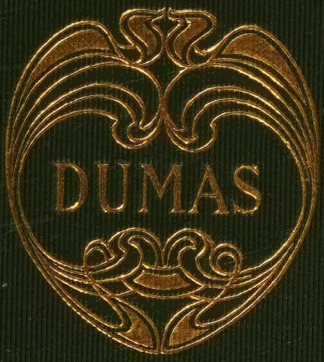
DUMAS

THE WORKS

OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

The Forty-five Guardsmen

NEW YORK
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

THE FORTY-FIVE GUARDSMEN

BY

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

COMPLETE TRANSLATION
FROM THE LATEST FRENCH EDITION

NEW YORK
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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INTRODUCTION.

1585–1586.

A SEQUEL does not always bring with it a sense of satisfaction and completeness. While the preceding story may be continued successfully, the sequel demands new phases or new characters which divert the purpose of the original plot or outweigh its value. But *The Forty-Five Guardsmen* is a logical and satisfying sequel to *La Dame de Monsoreau* from more than one aspect. It is the third and last of the Valois romances, the first being *Marguerite de Valois*, which, however, stands a little apart from the other two. These last are both concerned with the reign of Henry III.; they follow the evil star of the Duc d'Anjou to its setting; they watch the star of Henry IV. begin to rise; and they narrate the doings of the unrivalled jester, Chicot.

In *La Dame de Monsoreau* we read of the heroic death of Bussy d'Amboise. Some seven or eight years have elapsed, leaving of his name only a memory. But in the heart of his mistress, Diane, the memory is cherished as a holy vow of vengeance which transforms her entire life. From the passionate, loving woman of former days she has become cold, hard, and impassive, living only for the sake of vengeance. She is still beautiful enough to quicken in the forgetful D'Anjou's breast the ashes of an earlier desire — and to awaken, despite herself, an unrequited love in a young courtier's heart. The manner in which she makes of D'Anjou's passion an instrument of vengeance is perfect in its dramatic ideals. As to the historical accuracy of the episode we cannot state further than that D'Anjou actually died at Château Thierry in a sudden and mysterious manner.

Another dramatic touch in connection with this episode is

the figure of Catherine de Médicis, the great royal poisoner, by the bedside of her last hope for the Valois line, watching his life go out through the very means she had employed so often against others.

Let us look briefly with Dumas at the career of the disappointed and despicable François:

"Those of our readers who have been willing to turn over the pages of *Marguerite de Valois* and *La Dame de Monsoreau* are already acquainted with M. le Duc d'Anjou, that jealous, egotistical, ambitious, and impatient prince, who, born so near the throne, to which each event seemed to draw him nearer, had never been able to wait with patience until death should clear the way. So at first he had coveted the throne of Navarre under Charles IX., then that of Charles IX. himself, and finally that of France, occupied by his brother Henry, ex-King of Poland, who had worn two crowns, to the jealousy of his brother, who had never been able to secure one. For a time he had turned his eyes towards England, governed by a woman, and in order to have the throne he had asked the woman in marriage, although she was called Elizabeth and was twenty years older than he. At this point fate had begun to smile on him, if it would have been a smile of fate to marry the proud daughter of Henry VIII. He who all his life in his forward desires had not been able to succeed even in defending his liberty; who had seen killed, perhaps even had killed, his favorites, La Mole and Coconnas, and basely sacrificed Bussy, the bravest of his gentlemen, — the whole without advantage to his elevation and with great damage to his fame, — this man, repudiated by fortune, suddenly saw himself overwhelmed with the favors of a powerful queen, inaccessible up to then to any mortal glance, and raised by a whole people to the highest dignity which this people could confer. The inhabitants of Flanders offered him a crown and Elizabeth gave him her ring.

"We do not pretend to be an historian; if occasionally we become one, it is when history chances to descend to the level of romance, or better yet, when romance rises to the height of history; it is then that we plunge our inquisitive glances into the princely existence of the Duc d'Anjou, an existence which, always side by side with the illustrious path of royalty, is full of those events, sometimes sombre, sometimes brilliant, which are usually noticed only in the lives of kings."

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We who have read history or *The Forty-Five* know why neither Flanders' crown nor Elizabeth's ring availed him.

History furnishes a parallel to this royal brother in the person of Richard III. of England, who, however, replaced François' pusillanimity by a desperate courage.

The Duc d'Anjou has previously been spoken of as the villain of the Valois romances, in contrast with Henry of Navarre, the hero of them. Apparently the hero plays an insignificant part in the last two books. But it is for him a time of planning and waiting in which he masks his real self behind an indifference that deceives the most astute — and by "the most astute" we mean Chicot the jester.

"Since his stay in Navarre, Henry's character, like the skin of a chameleon, which assumes the color of the object upon which it happens to be, — Henry's character, on touching his native soil had undergone some changes. Henry had known how to put sufficient space between the royal claw and this precious skin which he had saved so skilfully from all rent so as not to fear any further attacks. However, his outward policy was always the same; he extinguished himself in the general uproar, extinguishing with him and around him some illustrious names which in the French world one wondered to see reflecting their brightness on a pale crown of Navarre. . . . In short, he vegetated, happy to live. For the vulgar he was a subject for hyperbolical jesting. For Chicot he was a subject for deep thought."

And yet, right upon the deep thought which the clever jester gave his subject, Chicot is completely out-generalled for the first and only time in his life by this same Henry. How Henry fought Chicot with his own weapons, how frankly Chicot admitted his defeat, and how warmly the two came to appreciate each other form some of the most entertaining chapters in the book.

Chicot himself does not deteriorate in this sequel. He appears again with all the wit, drollery, cleverness, and skill of earlier days. While his friend Gorenflot has become more puffed up with feasting and pride, Chicot retains his lankness of limb and sinew of arm. Although he recognizes the superiority of Henry of Navarre over his royal master, he is unswervingly faithful. "I have but one service to follow in this world, that of my prince," he replies to Navarre's proffered friendship; "let me serve him as long as he lives. Do

45 Guards.

not envy him his last servant." Ah, Chicot! never spoke truer heart!

Another continuation noted in this book is the growth of the Holy League, whose power harassed Henry III. to such an extent in *La Dame de Monsoreau.* Its continued plots find check after the King's famous "Forty-Five Guardsmen" are established. Still his reign is a troubled one to the end. And in the midst of it we finally leave him, watching on the one side this menacing power of allied Catholicism under the Guises; on the other side the increasing strength of the Protestant cause under Henry of Navarre; and answering the queen mother's sorrowful murmur by the bedside of the dead D'Anjou with the query, "Who will succeed me?"

J. Walker McSpadden.

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

Aurilly, confidant of the Duc d'Anjou.
Biran, Hector de, of the "Forty-Five."
Bonhomet, Maître Claude, host of the "Corne d'Abundance" inn.
Borroville, Captain, of the League; also known as Borromée.
Bouchage, Henri de Joyeuse, Comte du, confidant of the King.
Brigard, of the League.
Brisson, President of the Council.
Carmainges, Ernauton, Vicomte de, of the "Forty-Five."
Catherine de Médicis, queen mother.
Chalabre, De, of the "Forty-Five."
Chavantrade, Militor de, Gascon.
Chicot, De, King's jester; also known as Robert Briquet.
Chirac, physician to the Queen of Navarre.
Clement, Jacques, Jacobin monk.
Crillon, De, Colonel of the Guards.
Crucé, De, of the League.
D'Anjou, François, Duc, afterwards Duc de Brabant and Count of Flanders; brother of Henri III.
D'Aubiac, page at the Court of Navarre.
D'Épernon, Nogaret de la Valette, Duc, confidant of Henri III.
Eusèbe, Jacobin monk.
Fournichon, Maître, host of "The Sword of the Proud Chevalier" inn.
Fournichon, Dame, wife of foregoing.
Friard, Jean, citizen.
Goes, Flemish sailor.
Gorenflot, Dom Modeste, Jacobin monk.
Grandchamp, valet to the Baron de Méridor.

Guise, Henri de Lorraine, Duc de, of the League.
Henri III., King of France.
Henri de Bourbon, King of Navarre.
Joyeuse, Anne Daigues, Duc de, Grand Admiral of France.
Joyeuse, François, Cardinal de, of the court.
Leclerc, Bussy, of the League.
Le Haudouin, Rémy, physician, friend of Diane de Méridor.
Loignac, De, captain of the "Forty-Five."
Louise de Lorraine, Queen of France.
Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre.
Marteau, Lachappelle, of the League.
Mayenne, Duc de, of the League.
Mayneville, Comte de, of the League.
Miradoux, Eustache de, of the "Forty-Five."
Miradoux, Mme. Lardille de, wife of foregoing.
Miradoux, Militor de, son of foregoing.
Miron, court physician.
Miton, Maître, citizen.
Monsoreau, Mme. Diane de (née Méridor).
Montcrabeau, Pertinax de, of the "Forty-Five."
Montmorency, Mlle. de ("La Fosseuse"), of the court of Navarre.
Montpensier, Duchesse de, of the League.
Mornay, Duplessis de, of the court of Navarre.
Panurge, Jacobin monk.
Pincornay, Perducas de, of the "Forty-Five."
Poulain, Nicolas, of the League.
Saint-Aignan, Comte de, colonel under the Duc d'Anjou.
Sainte-Maline, René de, of the "Forty-Five."
Salcède, De, of the League.
Tanchon, Maître, commander of executions.
Turenne, Vicomte de, of the court of Navarre.
Vesin, De, commanding the Cahors garrison.
William of Nassau, Prince of Orange.

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THE FORTY-FIVE GUARDSMEN.

CHAPTER I.

THE PORTE SAINT ANTOINE.

Etiam si omnes!

On the 26th of October, in the year 1585, the gates of the Porte Saint Antoine, contrary to all custom, were still closed at half-past ten o'clock in the morning.

At a quarter to eleven, a guard of twenty Swiss, recognizable by their uniform as the Swiss from the small cantons, that is, the best friends of Henry III., then King, passed out of the street of the Mortellerie, and advanced toward the Porte Saint Antoine, which opened, and closed behind them.

Once outside the Porte, they ranged themselves along the hedges which beyond the gate bordered the straggling enclosures on either side of the road. By its mere presence, the guard drove back a goodly number of peasants and citizens coming from Montreuil, from Vincennes, or from Saint Maur, in order to enter the city before noon. This entrance they had been unable to effect, the Porte being closed, as we have stated. If it is true that a crowd, by its very nature, brings disorder with it, it might be supposed that by the sending of the guard the provost wished to anticipate the disturbance which might occur at the Porte Saint Antoine.

The crowd was enormous. People were arriving every moment by the three different roads; monks from the neighboring convents, women seated on the pack-saddles of asses, peasants in their carts, all helped to increase the already dense mass which had been stopped by the unusual closing of the gates, and all, by their questions, more or less pressing, made a low, continual murmur, while an occasional voice, rising above the general medley, ascended even to the pitch of anger or complaint.

Besides the multitude of those who wished to enter the city, there might have been observed some special groups who seemed to have come out from it. These, instead of gazing through the interstices of the gates at Paris, fixed their eyes on the horizon, bounded by the convent of the Jacobins, the priory of Vincennes, and the Croix Faubin, as if by one of these three routes, which formed a kind of fan, they were expecting the advent of some Messiah.

These latter groups were not unlike the tranquil islands in the middle of the Seine, around which the water, eddying and playing, detaches now a bit of sod, now some ancient willow twig, which, after hesitating for some time at the ripples, finally hurries away with the current.

These groups, to which we return with insistence, because they deserve our entire attention, consisted chiefly of bourgeois from Paris, closely wrapped in hose and doublet. We omitted to state that the weather was cold, the north wind piercing, and great low-hanging clouds seemed anxious to snatch from the trees the last yellow leaves, which hung sadly from them.

Three of these bourgeois were talking together; that is, two talked while the third listened; or, rather, let us express ourselves more clearly and say that the third did not seem even to listen, so intent was he in looking toward Vincennes. Let us first turn our attention to him. He was a man who must have been tall when he stood erect; but at this moment his long legs, with which he seemed at a loss to know what to do, when they were not in active use, were bent under him, and his arms, no less long in proportion, were folded on his doublet. He was leaning against the hedge, propped up by its pliant bushes; and with a determination which resembled the prudence of a man desirous of not being recognized, he kept his face hidden behind his hand, showing only one eye, whose piercing glance shot between his middle and ring fingers, separated to the distance that was just absolutely necessary to allow the passage of the visual ray. By the side of this strange personage a little man mounted on a hillock was talking to a large man, who was continually slipping off the hillock, and at every fall catching at the buttons of his interlocutor's doublet.

These were the other two bourgeois, who, together with the one who was seated, formed the mystic number three which we stated in a preceding paragraph.

"Yes, Maître Miton," said the little man to the large one; "yes, I tell you, and I repeat it, there will be a hundred thousand people around the scaffold of Salcède — a hundred thousand at least, without counting those who are already on the Place de Grève, or who are going thither from the various quarters of Paris. See how many are here, and this is only one gate! Judge, therefore, since by actual count there are sixteen gates!"

"A hundred thousand! that is a large number, Friard," answered the large man; "a great many, you may be sure, will follow my example, and will not go to see this unfortunate Salcède quartered, for fear of an uproar, and they will be right!"

"Maître Miton, Maître Miton, take care," said the little man. "You are talking like a politician. There will be no trouble at all, I am sure."

Then seeing his friend shake his head doubtfully, "Is it not so, monsieur," he went on, turning to the man with the long arms and legs, who, instead of continuing to stare towards Vincennes, had turned round, and without taking his hand from before his face, had selected the Porte as the object of his gaze.

"Pardon?" said the latter, as though he had heard only the question, and not the previous words which had been addressed to the second bourgeois.

"I say that there will be nothing on the Grève to-day."

"I think you are mistaken and that there will be the execution of Salcède," quietly replied the long-armed man.

"Yes, no doubt; but I say that there will be no noise about it."

"There will be the noise of the blows of the whip, which they will give to the horses."

"You do not understand me. By noise, I mean tumult. I say that there will be no tumult on the Grève. If there were likely to be a tumult, the King would not have had a stand decorated at the Hôtel de Ville, so that he himself, the two queens, and a part of the court could be present at the execution."

"Do kings ever know when there will be a tumult there?" said the man with the long arms and legs, shrugging his shoulders with an air of supreme pity.

"Oh! Oh!" said Maître Miton, leaning towards the ear of his friend; "this man speaks in a strange way. Do you know him?"

"No," replied the little man.

"Then why do you speak to him?"

"In order to talk to him."

"You are wrong. You can see readily enough that he is not naturally talkative."

"Yet it seems to me," replied Friard, loud enough to be heard by the man with the long arms, "that one of the great pleasures in life is to exchange thoughts."

"With those whom one knows, yes," replied Maître Miton, "but not with those with whom one is unacquainted."

"Are not all men brothers, as the priest of Saint Leu says?" added Friard, persuasively.

"Originally, yes; but in times like ours relationship is singularly relaxed, Friard. So talk with me, if you must talk, and leave this stranger to himself."

"I have been acquainted with you, as you say, for a long time, and I know beforehand what you will answer; while on the other hand, this stranger might perhaps have something new to say to me."

"Hush! he is listening."

"So much the better. If he listens, perhaps he will answer me. So, monsieur," continued Friard, turning to the stranger, "you think there will be some trouble on the Grève?"

"I? I said nothing of the kind."

"I do not claim that you said so," went on Friard, in a tone which he strove to render subtle. "I claim that you think so, that is all."

"And on what do you base your supposition? Are you a sorcerer, Monsieur Friard?"

"Why, he knows me!" exclaimed the bourgeois in great surprise. "How does he know me?"

"Have I not called you by name two or three times, my friend?" said Miton, shrugging his shoulders in the manner of a man who is ashamed of the limited intelligence of his questioner.

"Ah! true," replied Friard, making an effort to understand, and, thanks to the effort, succeeding. "It is certainly so. Well, since he knows me, he will answer me. Now, monsieur," he continued, turning to the stranger, "I believe you think there will be some noise on the Grève, for if you did not think so, you would be there, whereas, on the contrary, you are here. . . . Ah!"

This "Ah!" proved that in this deduction Friard had reached the furthest limits of his logic and his intelligence.

"But you, monsieur Friard, since you think contrary to what you think I think," replied the stranger, emphasizing the words already uttered by the other, and repeated by himself, "why are you not on the Grève? It seems to me that the spectacle is pleasing enough for the friends of the King to flock thither. As to that, perhaps you will tell me that you are not of the friends of the King, but of those of Monsieur de Guise, and that you are waiting here for the Lorraines, who, they say, are about to enter Paris, in order to deliver Monsieur de Salcède."

"No, monsieur," hastily replied the little man, visibly frightened at the stranger's suggestion. "No, monsieur, I am waiting for my wife, Nicole Friard, who has gone to take twenty-four tablecloths to the priory of the Jacobins, having the honor to be special washerwoman to Dom Modeste Gorenflot, abbé of the aforesaid priory of the Jacobins. But to return to what you said concerning the tumult of which my friend Miton was speaking, and in which I put no more faith than you do, at least."

"Comrade, comrade," cried Miton, "see what is going on!"

Maître Friard followed the direction indicated by his companion's finger, and saw that besides the gates the closing of which had already been such a cause of excitement, they were closing still another gate.

This done, a party of Swiss stationed themselves in front of the ditch.

"What!" cried Friard, turning pale, "were there not enough barriers, that they must now close another gate?"

"Well, what did I tell you?" replied Miton, growing pale in turn.

"It is queer, is it not?" said the stranger, smiling.

And in smiling he showed between his mustache and beard a double row of white, pointed teeth, which seemed wonderfully sharpened from their owner's habit of using them at least four times a day.

At sight of this new precaution, a long murmur of surprise and some cries of consternation rose from the dense crowd that filled the approaches to the gate.

"Clear the road!" cried the imperative voice of an officer.

This manœuvre was executed instantly, but not without

difficulty; those on horseback and in wagons, forced back, crushed some feet here and there, and broke the ribs of some among the crowd; women screamed, men swore, those who could do so fled, tumbling one over the other.

"The Lorraines! The Lorraines!" shouted a voice in the midst of all the tumult.

The most terrible cry taken from the pale vocabulary of fright could not have produced a more instantaneous or a more decisive result than this —

"The Lorraines!"

"So you see? You see?" cried Miton, trembling. "The Lorraines! The Lorraines! Let us flee!"

"Flee? and whither?" asked Friard.

"Into this enclosure," cried Miton, tearing his hands as he grasped the thorns of the hedge against which the stranger was carelessly leaning.

"Into this enclosure?" said Friard. "That is easier said than done, Maître Miton. I see no opening by which we can enter, and you do not propose to climb the hedge, which is higher than I am."

"I shall try," said Miton. "I shall try."

And he resumed his efforts.

"Ah, take care, my good woman!" cried Friard, in the agonizing tone of a man who is beginning to lose control of himself. "Your ass is stepping on my heels. Oh! monsieur, look out! your horse is going to kick. Heavens, my friend! you are ramming the shafts of your wagon into my ribs."

While Maître Miton was grasping the branches of the hedge in order to climb over it, and his friend Friard was vainly seeking an opening through which he could creep, the stranger rose, and by merely stretching his long legs, with a movement as simple as that by which a horseman places himself in his saddle, he strode over the hedge without a single branch touching his hose.

Maître Miton followed his example, but tore his hose in three places. It went otherwise with Friard, who, unable either to climb over or creep through, and more and more in danger of being crushed by the crowd, uttered heart-rending cries, whereat the stranger extended his long arm, caught him by the ruff and the collar of his doublet, and raising him, lifted him to the other side of the hedge, as easily as he would have lifted a child.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" cried Maître Miton, rejoiced at the sight, and letting his eyes follow the ascent and descent of his friend Friard, "you look like the sign of the great Absalom."

"Oh!" cried Friard, as he touched the ground, "I may look like whatever you please, now that, thanks to monsieur, I am on this side of the hedge."

Then straightening himself in order to look at the stranger, to whose breast he scarcely reached:

"Ah! monsieur," he continued, "what a graceful act! Monsieur, you are a veritable Hercules, on my word of honor, the honor of Jean Friard! Your name, monsieur, the name of my deliverer, the name of my friend?"

And the brave fellow uttered the last word in the effusion of a heart profoundly grateful.

"I am called Briquet, monsieur," replied the stranger, "Robert Briquet, at your service."

"And you have already served me considerably, Monsieur Robert Briquet, I venture to say. Oh! my wife will bless you. But, by the way, my poor wife! Oh! my God, my God! She will be suffocated in this crowd. Ah! cursed Swiss, fit only to crush people!"

Scarcely had Friard finished speaking when he felt on his shoulder a hand as heavy as that of a stone statue.

He turned in order to see who it was that was taking such liberty with him. The hand was that of a Swiss.

"Do you want dem do kill you, my leetle freund?" asked the robust soldier.

"Ah! we are surrounded!" cried Friard.

"Let each one save himself as best he can," added Miton; and both, thanks to the fact that the hedge had been scaled, having no obstacle before them, gained the open, followed by the mocking eyes and the quiet laugh of the man with the long arms and legs.

When they were out of sight, the latter approached the Swiss, who had just been stationed there on guard.

"Your hand, apparently, is of use, my friend," said he.

"Faith! monsieur, not pad, not pad."

"So much the better, for it is an important thing, especially if, as they say, the Lorraines are coming."

"Dey vill not come!"

"No?"

"Not at all."

"How happens it, then, that this gate is closed? I do not understand."

"No neet to understant," replied the Swiss, laughing loudly at his own wit.

"That 's true, comrade, very true; thanks."

And Robert Briquet left the Swiss to join another group, while the worthy Helvetian stopped laughing and muttered:

"Mein Gott! Ich glaube er soottet meiner. Was ist das für ein Mann der sich erlaubt einen Schweizer seiner kœniglichen Majestæt auszulachen," which translated meant:

"My God! I believe he is laughing at me. Who is this man who dares to make fun of a Swiss belonging to his Majesty?"

CHAPTER II.

WHAT TOOK PLACE OUTSIDE THE PORTE SAINT ANTOINE.

One of the groups consisted of a considerable number of citizens, who had been surprised outside of the city by the unexpected closing of the gates. These citizens surrounded four or five cavaliers of martial bearing, whom the closing of the gates greatly annoyed, apparently, for they cried out with all their might:

"The gate! The gate!"

The shouts, violently taken up by every one, caused for the moment an infernal clatter.

Robert Briquet advanced toward the group, and began to shout louder than any of them: "The gate! The gate!" As a result, one of the cavaliers, charmed with the strong voice, turned to him, bowed, and said:

"Is it not shameful, monsieur, that they close the gate of the city in broad daylight, as though the Spanish or the English were besieging Paris?"

Robert Briquet looked attentively at the speaker, a man of forty or forty-five years of age. He seemed, moreover, to be the leader among the three or four who surrounded him.

The examination doubtless inspired Robert Briquet with confidence, for he immediately bowed in turn, and answered:

"Ah, monsieur, you are right, ten times right, twenty times right; but," he added, "without being too inquisitive, may I

venture to ask what you think is the motive for such an action ? "

"*Pardieu !*" said a bystander ; "the fear they have lest some one shall eat their Salcède."

"*Cap de Bious !*" exclaimed a voice, — "sorry food !"

Robert Briquet turned in the direction of the voice, the accent of which was strongly Gascon, and saw a young man of twenty or twenty-five, resting his hand on the crupper of the horse belonging to the man who had seemed to him to be the leader.

The young man was bareheaded ; no doubt he had lost his hat in the confusion.

Maître Briquet appeared to be an observer ; but, as a rule, his observations were rapid, hence he quickly withdrew his eyes from the Gascon, who no doubt seemed to him of no importance, and returned to the cavalier.

"But," said he, "since it is said that this Salcède belongs to Monsieur de Guise, it is not such a poor ragoût."

"Bah ! they say that ?" asked the curious Gascon, opening his great ears.

"Yes, no doubt they say that," replied the cavalier, shrugging his shoulders, "but in these times they say many silly things."

"Ah !" hazarded Briquet, with his quizzical glance and his mocking smile, "so you believe, monsieur, that Salcède does not belong to Monsieur de Guise ?"

"I not only do not believe it, I am sure of it," replied the cavalier.

Then, as he saw that Robert Briquet in drawing nearer made a gesture as though to say : "Ah ! bah ! and on what do you base your conviction ?" he continued :

"Assuredly not ; if Salcède had belonged to the duke, the latter would not have let him be captured, or at least would not have allowed him to be carried from Brussels to Paris, bound hand and foot, without at least making an attempt to rescue him."

"An attempt at rescue," said Briquet, "would have been very dangerous, for, whether it succeeded or not, the instant that it came from Monsieur de Guise, Monsieur de Guise would have been admitting that he had conspired against the Duke of Anjou."

"Monsieur de Guise," dryly replied the cavalier, "would

not have been withheld by any such consideration, I am sure, and from the moment that he neither reclaimed nor defended Salcède, Salcède no longer belonged to him."

"Yet, pardon me if I insist," continued Briquet, "but it is not I who invent; it seems that Salcède has spoken."

"Where? Before the judges?"

"No, not before the judges, monsieur; to the torture.

"Is it not the same thing?" asked Maître Robert Briquet; in a manner that he vainly strove to render unaffected.

"No, certainly it is not the same thing, — far from it. Moreover, they claim that he has spoken, but they do not repeat what he said."

"Excuse me again, monsieur," went on Robert Briquet; "they do repeat it, and at great length, too."

"And what did he say?" demanded the cavalier, impatiently. "Speak, since you are so well informed."

"I do not boast of being well informed, monsieur, since, on the contrary, I am trying to gain information from you," replied Briquet.

"Come, let us understand each other!" exclaimed the cavalier, impatiently. "You stated that they repeated the words of Salcède. What were they? Speak."

"I cannot say that they were his own words, monsieur," said Robert Briquet, who seemed to take pleasure in irritating the cavalier.

"Well, then, what are those they attribute to him?"

"They say that he has confessed that he conspired for Monsieur de Guise."

"Against the King of France, no doubt? Always the same story!"

"Not against his Majesty the King of France, but against his Highness Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou."

"If he confessed that" —

"Well," said Robert Briquet.

"Well, he is a villain!" exclaimed the cavalier, frowning.

"Yes," said Robert Briquet in a low tone; "but if he did what he has confessed, he is a brave man!"

"Ah! monsieur, the boot, the gibbet, and the boiler make honest men confess many things."

"Alas! you state a great truth, monsieur," said the cavalier, becoming more calm, as he heaved a sigh.

"Bah!" interrupted the Gascon, who by bending his head

in the direction of each speaker had heard everything. "Bah! boot, gibbet, boiler, — fine torture that! If this Salcède has spoken, he is a knave, and his patron is another."

"Oh, oh," said the cavalier, unable to repress a start of impatience, "you are speaking in a very loud tone, Monsieur Gascon."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"I speak in the tone which pleases me, *Cap de Bious!* So much the worse for those whom my words do not please."

The cavalier made a gesture of anger.

"Softly!" said a gentle and at the same time imperative voice, the owner of which Robert Briquet sought in vain.

The cavalier seemed to make an effort, but had not the strength to regain complete control of himself.

"Do you know those of whom you speak, monsieur," he asked the Gascon.

"Do I know Salcède?"

"Yes."

"Not in the least."

"And the Duc de Guise?"

"No."

"And the Duc d'Alençon?"

"Still less."

"Do you know that Monsieur Salcède is a brave man?"

"So much the better; he will die bravely."

"And that when Monsieur de Guise wishes to conspire he will conspire himself?"

"*Cap de Bious!* what is that to me?"

"And that the Duc d'Anjou, formerly Monsieur d'Alençon, has killed or allowed to be killed whoever was interested in him — La Mole, Coconas, Bussy, and the rest?"

"What do I care for that?"

"What! you do not care?"

"Mayneville! Mayneville!" murmured the same voice.

"Certainly, it is nothing to me. I know only one thing, *sangdieu*, I have business in Paris this very day, this morning, and because of this madman Salcède they close the gates in my face. *Cap de Bious!* this Salcède is a scoundrel, and so are all those who, with him, are the cause of these gates being closed instead of opened."

"Oh! Oh! what a fierce Gascon," murmured Robert Briquet, "no doubt we shall see something interesting."

But this interesting something for which the bourgeois was waiting did not happen. The last remarks had caused the blood to rush to the face of the cavalier, but he lowered his head, became silent, and swallowed his anger.

"As a matter of fact," said he, "you are right — a plague on all those who keep us from entering Paris!"

"Oh! Oh!" said Robert Briquet to himself, who had lost neither the changes on the face of the cavalier nor the two calls made on his patience; "ah! ah! it seems that I am to see something more interesting than I expected."

As he reflected thus, there came the sound of a trumpet, and almost at the same instant the Swiss broke through the crowd with their halberds, as though they were cutting into a great pie of birds, and separated the groups into two compact masses, which lined up along either side of the road, leaving the middle clear. Through this cleared space the officer of whom we have spoken, and into whose keeping the gate seemed entrusted, passed up and down on his horse; then after a moment's survey, which resembled a challenge, he ordered the trumpets to sound. This was done instantly, and caused a silence throughout the masses which one would have believed impossible after so much agitation and confusion.

Then the crier, in a flowered tunic, bearing on his breast a scutcheon on which shone the arms of Paris, advanced, a paper in his hand, and read in the nasal voice peculiar to criers:

"Let it be known to our good people of Paris, and the environs, that the gates will be closed from now until one o'clock in the afternoon, and that no one can enter the city before that hour; and this by the will of the King and by order of Monsieur the Provost of Paris."

The crier stopped to take breath. At once the crowd took advantage of the pause to manifest their astonishment and discontent by a long hoot, which the crier, justice is due to him, bore without moving a muscle.

The officer raised his hand imperatively, and at once silence returned.

The crier continued without difficulty or hesitation, as though habit had hardened him against these outbursts of which he had just been the target.

"Those are exempt from this who shall present themselves

as bearers of a sign of recognition or who shall be duly summoned by letter or mandate.

"Given at the Hôtel of the Provostship of Paris, by the express order of his Majesty, the 26th of October in the year of grace 1585.

"Trumpets, sound!"

The trumpets at once gave forth their hoarse barkings.

Scarcely had the crier ceased speaking when behind the line of Swiss and soldiers the crowd began to undulate, swelling and twisting like a serpent.

"What does that mean?" asked the more peaceful ones. "No doubt some plot."

"Oh! it is probably to keep us from entering Paris that the matter has been so arranged," said the cavalier who had borne with such singular patience the rebuffs of the Gascon, in a low tone to his companions; "these Swiss, this crier, these bolts, these trumpets are for us. On my soul, I am proud of them!"

"Room! Room, you others!" cried the officer in command of troops. "A thousand devils! You see well enough that you prevent those from passing who have a right to enter the gates."

"*Cap de Bious!* I know one who will pass, though all the bourgeois on earth were between him and the gate," and the Gascon who by his sharp replies had won the admiration of Maître Robert Briquet elbowed his way through the crowd.

In an instant he reached the open space which, thanks to the Swiss, had been made between the two masses of spectators.

One may imagine that all eyes were turned with alacrity and interest towards the man favored sufficiently to enter when he had been ordered to remain outside.

But the Gascon paid little heed to all the envious glances. He took his stand proudly, making every muscle of his body stand out under his thin green doublet. The muscles seemed like so many cords pulled by an inner crank. His dry, bony wrists extended three good inches below his shabby sleeves. He had a clear glance, yellow hair, which curled either naturally or by chance, for the dust had been creeping into its color for a good ten years. His large supple feet were supported by nervous, dry legs like those of a buck. Over one of his hands he had drawn a glove of embroidered kid which was greatly surprised to see itself destined to protect the other skin rougher than itself; in his other hand he flipped a

hazel twig. For a moment he glanced around him; then, thinking that the officer to whom reference has been made was the most important person of the troop, he walked straight to him.

The latter looked at him for some moments without speaking.

The Gascon, not the least disconcerted, returned his glance.

"You have lost your hat, it appears," said the officer.

"Yes, monsieur."

"In the crowd?"

"No. I had just received a letter from my mistress; I was reading it, *Cap de Bious*, near the river, a quarter of a mile from here, when suddenly a gust of wind carried away letter and hat. I ran after the letter, although the button of my hat was a single diamond. I recovered my letter; but when I returned to the hat, the wind had carried it into the river, and the river into Paris! . . . it will make the fortune of some poor devil; so much the better!"

"So that you go bareheaded?"

"Can one not find a hat in Paris? *Cap de Bious!* I will buy a more magnificent one, and I will put on it a diamond twice as large as the first."

The officer gave an imperceptible shrug of the shoulders, but slight as it was the movement, it did not escape the Gascon.

"Beg pardon?" said he.

"Have you a card?" demanded the officer.

"Certainly, I have one, or rather two."

"One will suffice if it is the right one."

"But I am not mistaken," continued the Gascon, opening his great eyes. "Why, no, *Cap de Bious!* I am not mistaken; I have the honor of addressing Monsieur de Loignac?"

"It is possible, monsieur," replied the officer, coldly, apparently little pleased by the recognition.

"Monsieur de Loignac, my fellow-countryman?"

"I do not deny it."

"My cousin!"

"That's good! Your card!"

"Here it is."

The Gascon drew from his glove the half of a card skilfully cut.

"Follow me," said De Loignac, without looking at it, "you

and your companions, if you have any. We will verify the admissions."

And he took his stand near the gate.

The Gascon with the bare head followed. Five others followed with bare heads.

The first was adorned with a splendid cuirass, so marvellously wrought that it might have come from the hands of Benvenuto Cellini. However, as the pattern was somewhat old-fashioned, its magnificence occasioned more laughter than admiration.

It is true that no other detail of the costume of the man who wore the cuirass equalled the almost royal splendor of the prospectus.

The second man who clamped along was followed by a big gray-haired lackey, and thin and tanned as he was, he looked like the precursor of Don Quixote, as his servant might have passed for that of Sancho Panza.

The third appeared carrying in his arms a child of ten months. He was followed by a woman who kept tight hold of his leather belt, while two other children, one four, the other five years of age, clung to her dress.

The fourth limped, and was attached to a long sword. Finally the procession came to an end with a handsome young man, mounted on a black horse which was covered with dust, though evidently a thoroughbred. By the side of the others this man looked like a king.

Forced to advance slowly so as not to leave his comrades behind, perhaps, also, inwardly pleased at not being too close to them, the young man paused an instant at the edge of the line formed by the people. Just then he felt a pull at the scabbard of his sword, and he turned round.

The one who had thus attracted his attention was a slight, graceful young man, with black hair and shining eyes. On his hands he wore gloves.

"What can I do for you, monsieur?" said the cavalier.

"A favor, monsieur."

"Speak, but speak quickly, I beg; you see that they are waiting for me."

"I must enter the city, monsieur — an imperative necessity — you understand? As for you, you are alone, and need a page to do credit to your fine appearance."

"Well?"

"Well; consent! consent! Take me in; I will be your page."

"Thank you," said the cavalier; "but I do not wish to be served by any one."

"Not even by me?" asked the young man with such a strange smile that the cavalier felt the icy reserve in which he had tried to encase his heart beginning to melt away.

"I meant to say that I was not able to be served."

"Yes, I know that you are not rich, Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges," said the young page.

The cavalier started; but without paying attention to that, the boy went on:

"So do not let us speak of wages; and it will be you, on the contrary, if you grant me what I ask, who shall be paid a hundredfold for the services you render me. Let me serve you, I beg, and remember that he who now begs has sometimes commanded."

The young man pressed Ernauton's hand with too much familiarity for a page; then turning to the group of cavaliers whom we already know, he said: "I shall pass in; this is the most important thing. But you, Mayneville, try to do as much by some means or other."

"Your passing in is not everything," replied that gentleman; "it is necessary that he should see you."

"Oh, make yourself easy. As soon as I am through this gate, he shall see me."

"Do not forget the sign agreed on."

"Two fingers on the lips, is it not?"

"Yes. God help you!"

"Well, master page," said the man on the black horse; "have we made up our mind?"

"Here I am, master," replied the young man; and he sprang lightly to the saddle behind his companion, who rejoined the five other fortunate ones occupied in showing their cards, thus proving their right to enter.

"*Ventre de biche!*" exclaimed Robert Briquet, as he followed them with his eyes. "That is a whole company of Gascons, or the devil take me!"

CHAPTER III.

THE EXAMINATION.

The necessary examination of the six privileged ones whom we have seen issue from the ranks of the populace in order to enter the gates was neither very long nor very complicated.

It consisted in taking from the pocket the half card and handing it to the officer, who compared it with another half, and if the two halves fitted together and made one, the rights of the bearer of the card were assured.

The Gascon with the bare head advanced first; the examination began with him.

"Your name?" said the officer.

"My name, monsieur? It is written on that card, on which you will find something else besides."

"Never mind! Your name," repeated the officer, impatiently. "Don't you know your name?"

"Indeed, I know it, *Cap de Bious!* and I might have forgotten it in order that you might tell it to me, since we are fellow-countrymen, and even cousins."

"Your name? A thousand devils! Do you suppose I have time to waste in reminiscences?"

"Well, I am Perducas de Pincornay."

"Perducas de Pincornay?" said Monsieur de Loignac, whom henceforth we shall call by the name which his fellow-countryman gave him.

Then glancing at the card:

"Perducas de Pincornay, October 26, 1585, at noon precisely."

"Porte Saint Antoine," added the Gascon, pointing to the card with his brown, thin finger.

"Very good! it's all right; enter," said Monsieur de Loignac, in order to cut short all further conversation between him and his countrymen. "You next," said he to the second applicant.

The man with the cuirass advanced.

"Your card!" demanded De Loignac.

"Well, Monsieur de Loignac," cried this one, "do you not recognize the son of one of the friends of your childhood, whom you have dandled twenty times on your knees?"

"No."

"Pertinax de Montcrabeau;" said the young man in astonishment, "do you not recognize me?"

"When I am on duty I recognize no one, monsieur. Your card!" The young man with the cuirass held out his card.

"Pertinax de Montcrabeau, October 25, at noon precisely. Porte Saint Antoine. Pass on."

The young man moved forward, and somewhat surprised by his reception, rejoined Perducas, who was waiting at the entrance of the Porte.

The third Gascon approached. It was the one with the wife and children.

"Your card!" demanded De Loignac. His obedient hand plunged at once into a small satchel of goatskin which he wore at his right side.

But in vain. Embarrassed by the child which he carried in his arms, he could not find the paper asked for.

"What the devil are you doing with that child, monsieur? You see well enough that he is a bother to you."

"He is my son, Monsieur de Loignac."

"Well! Put your son down on the ground." The Gascon obeyed. The child began to howl.

"So you are married, then?" asked De Loignac.

"Yes, monsieur."

"At twenty?"

"We marry young with us; you know that very well, Monsieur de Loignac. You yourself were married at eighteen."

"Ah!" said De Loignac, "here is another who knows me!"

Meanwhile the woman had approached, followed by the children clinging to her skirt.

"And why should he not be married?" she cried, drawing herself up, and pushing back from her thin forehead the black hair, which the dust of the road had matted down like dough. "Is it out of fashion to marry in Paris? Yes, monsieur, he is married, and here are two other children who call him father."

"Yes, but they are the sons of my wife, Monsieur de Loignac, as is also that big fellow yonder. Come here, Militor, and salute Monsieur de Loignac, our fellow-countryman."

A lad of sixteen or eighteen, his hands in his buff leather belt, came forward, vigorous, agile, resembling a falcon with his round eye and hooked nose.

He wore a loose knitted woollen jacket, and his muscular

limbs were clothed in chamois-skin breeches. A budding mustache shaded his lip, at once insolent and sensual.

"This is Militor, my step-son, Monsieur de Loignac, the eldest son of my wife, who is a Chavantrade, a relative of the De Loignacs. Militor de Chavantrade at your service. Salute, Militor."

Then stooping over the child, who was rolling and crying in the road:

"Be quiet, Scipio; be quiet, little one," he added, searching all his pockets for the card.

In the meantime, Militor, in obedience to his father's injunction, was bowing stiffly, without taking his hands from his belt.

"For the love of Heaven, monsieur, your card!" cried De Loignac, impatiently.

"Lardille, come and help me," cried the blushing Gascon to his wife.

Lardille freed herself from the clinging hands, and searched the satchel and the pockets of her husband.

"Well!" she exclaimed, "we must have lost it."

"In that case, I shall have you arrested," said De Loignac.

The Gascon turned pale.

"I am Eustache de Miradoux," said he, "and I recommend myself to my kinsman, Monsieur de Sainte Maline."

"Ah, you are kinsman of Sainte Maline?" said De Loignac, somewhat mollified. "It is true that if one pay attention to them, they are related to everybody! Well, search again, and to some purpose."

"Lardille, look among the children's clothes," said Eustache, trembling with vexation and anxiety.

Lardille knelt down before a modest bundle of clothes, and turned them over and over, muttering to herself.

The young Scipio continued to scream, while his step-brothers, seeing that no attention was paid to them, amused themselves by pouring sand into his mouth.

Militor did not move. One would have said that the troubles of family life passed over or under this great fellow without touching him.

"Why!" exclaimed Monsieur de Loignac, suddenly; "what do I see yonder in a leather wrapper, on the sleeve of that booby?"

"Oh, oh! that's it!" cried Eustache, in triumph; "that

was Lardille's idea, I remember now; she sewed the envelope on Militor."

"That he might carry something," said De Loignac, ironically. "Fie, the great calf! He does not even hold up his arms for fear of carrying them."

Militor's lips turned white with anger, while the blood rushed over his nose, chin, and eyebrows.

"A calf has no arms," he muttered, with flashing eyes: "he has hoofs, like some animals of my acquaintance."

"Silence!" said Eustache; "you know very well, Militor, that Monsieur de Loignac does us the honor to jest with us."

"No, by Heaven! I am not jesting," replied De Loignac. "On the contrary, I want this great stupid to take my words as I meant them. If he were my step-son, I would make him carry mother, brother, bundle, and by Heaven! I would mount on top of the whole pile, just to pull his ears, and prove to him that he is nothing but an ass."

Militor was greatly embarrassed; Eustache seemed anxious, but beneath his anxiety there lurked an indescribable pleasure at the insult given to his step-son.

Lardille, in order to end the discussion and save her first-born from the irony of Monsieur de Loignac, handed the officer the card which she had taken out of the leather wrapper.

Monsieur de Loignac took it and read: "Eustache de Miradoux, October 26, noon precisely, Porte Saint Antoine."

"Pass on," said he, "and see that you forget none of your brats, ugly or handsome."

Eustache de Miradoux raised the small Scipio to his arms, Lardille again caught hold of his belt, the two children seized their mother's dress, and this family bunch, followed by the silent Militor, ranged themselves near those who were waiting after their examination was over.

"The deuce!" muttered De Loignac between his teeth, watching Eustache de Miradoux and his family move off. "The plague of soldiers Monsieur d'Épernon will have in them." Then he turned back. "Well," said he, addressing the fourth applicant.

The latter was alone and very stiff, and kept flipping his iron-gray doublet with his thumb and middle finger, in order to brush off the dust. His mustache seemed made of cat's hair, and his green shining eyes and his eyebrows, the arch of which formed a semi circle that stood out above two prominent

cheek-bones, and his thin lips, gave to his physiognomy that look of mistrust and parsimonious reserve which one recognizes in a man who hides the depths of his purse as well as the depths of his heart.

"Chalabre, October 26, at noon precisely, Porte Saint Antoine. That's all right. Pass on," said De Loignac.

"The expenses of the journey are allowed me, I presume?" observed the Gascon, quietly.

"I am not treasurer, monsieur," replied De Loignac, coldly. "I am merely gate keeper; move on."

Chalabre did so.

Behind him came a blonde young cavalier, who in pulling out his card let fall from his pocket a die and several spot cards.

He said that his name was Saint Capautel, and this statement being confirmed by his card, which was found to be correct, he followed Chalabre.

There remained the sixth, who, at the suggestion of the improvised page, had dismounted from his horse and handed Monsieur de Loignac a card on which was written:

"Ernauton de Carmainges, October 26, at noon precisely, Porte Saint Antoine."

While Monsieur de Loignac was engaged in reading this the page slipped down and tried to keep his face concealed by adjusting the curb of his pretended master's horse, already in perfect order.

"This is your page, monsieur?" asked De Loignac of Ernauton, pointing with his finger to the young man.

"You see, monsieur," said Ernauton, who wished neither to lie nor to betray, "you see that he is attending to my horse's bridle."

"Pass on," said Monsieur de Loignac, gazing attentively at Monsieur de Carmainges, whose face and bearing seemed to please him better than those of all the others. "He is a passable one, at least," he muttered.

Ernauton again mounted; the page, without pretence and without delay, had gone ahead, and was already mingling with those who had preceded him.

"Open the gate," said De Loignac, "and let these six persons and their followers enter."

"Quick, quick, my master," said the page, "let us into the saddle, and be off!"

Again Ernauton yielded to the power which this strange being exercised over him, and, the gate being opened, he spurred his horse, and, guided by the words of the page, plunged into the heart of the Faubourg Saint Antoine.

De Loignac ordered the gate closed behind the six privileged applicants, to the intense discontent of the crowd, who, the formalities over, had thought that they might pass in, in turn, and who, now that this hope was blasted, loudly proclaimed their disapprobation.

Maître Miton, who, after a free run across country, had by degrees regained courage, and who by sounding the ground at every step had finally returned to the place from which he had started, now ventured some complaints as to the arbitrary way in which the soldiery stopped all communication with Paris.

Friard, who had succeeded in finding his wife, and who, protected by her, seemed to fear nothing, related to his better half the news of the day, embellished by comments of his own.

Finally the cavaliers, one of whom had been addressed as Mayneville by the little page, held a consultation as to whether they could not move the stones of the city wall, with the reasonable hope of finding some breach in it, through which they could enter Paris, without need of further waiting at the Porte Saint Antoine or at any other porte.

Robert Briquet, like a thinking philosopher, and a scholar who extracts the pith, had perceived that the *dénoument* of the scene which we have just described would take place near the Porte, and that the conversation of the various cavaliers, the bourgeois, and the peasants would tell him nothing more.

Therefore he approached as near as possible to a small booth which served as porter's lodge, and which was lighted by two windows, the one looking toward Paris, the other into the country.

Scarcely had he taken up his new position when a man, coming from Paris at full gallop, leaped from his horse, and, entering the lodge, appeared at the window.

"Ah, ah!" said De Loignac.

"Here I am, Monsieur de Loignac," said the man.

"Good! whence do you come?"

"From the Porte Saint Victor."

"Your number?"

"Five."

"The cards?"

"Are here."

De Loignac took the cards, examined them, and wrote the number five on a slate which seemed intended for that purpose. The messenger departed.

Scarcely five minutes elapsed before two other messengers arrived. De Loignac questioned each in turn, and always through the grating.

One came from the Porte Bourdelle, and brought the number four; the other from the Porte du Temple, and announced the number six. De Loignac carefully wrote the numbers on the slate.

These messengers went away like the first ones, and were replaced in turn by four others, who arrived as follows:

The first from the Porte Saint Denis, with the number five; the second from the Porte Saint Jacques, with the number three; the third from the Porte Saint Honoré, with the number eight; the fourth from the Porte Montmartre, with the number four. Finally came one from the Porte Bussy, bringing the number four. De Loignac wrote them all down with care, and below them the portes and the number, as follows:

Porte Saint Victor	5
" Bourdelle	4
" du Temple	6
" Saint Denis	5
" Saint Jacques	3
" Saint Honoré	8
" Montmartre	4
" Bussy	4
Lastly, Porte Saint Antoine	6
Total	45

"That is well. Now," cried De Loignac, in a loud voice, "open the gates, and let all who wish to do so, enter."

The gates were thrown open.

At once horses, mules, women, children, and wagons rushed into Paris, at the risk of being suffocated between the two piers of the drawbridge.

In a quarter of an hour the whole tide, which since morning

had been held back by the momentary dyke, had poured into the city through that vast artery called the Rue Saint Antoine.

By degrees the noise subsided. Monsieur de Loignac remounted his horse with the rest. Robert Briquet, the last, as he had been the first, phlegmatically strode over the chain of the bridge, saying :

"All these people wanted to see something, and they have seen nothing, even of their own affairs ; I wanted to see nothing, and I alone have seen something. It is interesting, too ; I will keep on ; but to what good ? *Pardieu !* I know enough of it. Will it be any great advantage to me to see Monsieur de Salcède torn into four parts ? No, *pardieu !* Besides, I have given up politics. I will go and dine ; the sun would point to noon, if there were any sun ; it is time."

So saying, he entered Paris with his quiet, ironical smile.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STAND OF HIS MAJESTY KING HENRY III. ON THE GRÈVE.

If we were now to follow as far as the Place de Grève, where it ends this populous thoroughfare of the quarter Saint Antoine, we should find many of our acquaintances in the crowd ; but while all these poor citizens, less wise than Robert Briquet, are going thither, pushing, elbowing, and fighting one behind another, we prefer, thanks to the privilege which our historian's wings give us, to transport ourselves directly to the Place, and, when we have embraced the whole spectacle at a glance, to return an instant to the past, in order to examine the cause, after having contemplated the effect. We might say that Maître Friard was right in estimating a hundred thousand men, at least, as the number of those who would gather on the Place de Grève, and its vicinity, to enjoy the spectacle which was being prepared there. All Paris made a rendezvous of the Hôtel de Ville, and Paris is very exact. Paris never misses a fête, and the death of a man is a fête, and a very extraordinary one, especially when he has succeeded in rousing so many passions that some curse and others bless him, while the greatest number pity him.

The spectator who succeeded in reaching the Place either from the quay near the Inn of the Image of Nôtre Dame, or from the porch of the Place Beaudoyer, perceived at first, in the centre of the Grève, the arches of Tanchon the lieutenant of the short robe, and a goodly number of Swiss and light horse surrounding a small scaffold raised about four feet from the ground.

This scaffold, so low as to be visible only to those who were close to it, or to those who had the good fortune to have a position at some window, was waiting for the victim, of whom the priests had had possession since morning, and for whom, in the effective words of the people, his horses were waiting to bear him away on his long journey. In fact, under an archway of the first building beyond the Rue du Mouton, four strong Percheron horses with white manes and tails, and hairy legs, stamped impatiently on the pavement, bit at one another, and neighed, to the great consternation of the women, who had voluntarily chosen that place, or who had been forcibly driven to it.

The horses were fresh ones. They had scarcely done more than, occasionally, in the grassy meadows of their native country carry on their broad backs the chubby child of some peasant who, delayed, was returning from the fields at set of sun.

But after the empty scaffold, after the neighing horses, that which especially attracted the attention of the crowd was the principal window of the Hôtel de Ville, draped with red velvet and gold, and from the balcony of which hung a velvet rug ornamented with the royal arms. This window was the private box of the King.

Half-past one struck from Saint Jean on the Grève, when the window, like the setting of a picture, began to be filled with persons who took up their positions within its frame.

The first was King Henry III., pale, almost bald, although at this time he was not more than thirty-four or five years old; his eyes were sunk in bluish orbits and his mouth trembled with nervous contractions.

He entered, gloomy, his eyes fixed in their gaze, at once majestic and unsteady, singular in his appearance, singular in his bearing, a shadow rather than a living person, a spectre rather than a king; a mystery always incomprensible, and always misunderstood by his subjects, who, when they saw him

appear, never knew whether to cry, "Long live the King!" or to pray for his soul.

Henry was dressed in a black doublet trimmed with black lace; he wore neither order nor jewels; a solitary diamond shone in his cap, serving as a fastening for three short curled plumes. He carried in his left hand a little black dog which his sister-in-law, Marie Stuart, had sent him from her prison, and on whose silky coat his slender white fingers shone like alabaster.

Behind him came Catharine de Medicis, already bent with age, — for the queen mother must at this time have been sixty-six or seven years old. She still bore her head firm and erect, however, and darted bitter glances from beneath her brow, which was habitually frowning. Yet in spite of this she was like a wax statue, always lifeless and cold in her eternal mourning.

With her appeared the sad but sweet face of Queen Louise of Lorraine, wife of Henry III., apparently an insignificant, but in reality a faithful companion during his tempestuous and unhappy life.

Queen Catharine de Medicis was marching to a triumph; Queen Louise was taking part in an execution; King Henry was attending to business, a triple shade which was visible on the haughty brow of the first, on the resigned features of the second, and on the clouded and weary face of the third.

Behind these illustrious persons, so pale and silent, whom the people admired, came two handsome young men, the one scarcely twenty years of age, the other twenty-five at the most.

They had hold of each other's arms, in spite of the etiquette which, in the presence of a King, as at church in the presence of God, forbids that men should seem attached to anything.

They were smiling; the youngest with ineffable sadness, the oldest with enchanting grace; they were beautiful, and tall, and were brothers.

The youngest was called Henry de Joyeuse, Count du Bouchage; the other, Duke Anne de Joyeuse. Until recently he was known only by the name of Arques; but a year ago King Henry, who loved him above everything else, had created him peer of France, by instituting the viscounty as a dukedom, with a peerage attached to it.

The people had for this favorite none of the hatred which

they once had for Maugiron, Quélus, and Schomberg, a hatred which D'Épernon alone had inherited. Therefore the people hailed the prince and the two brothers by discreet but flattering acclamations.

Henry saluted the crowd gravely, and without a smile ; then he kissed his dog on the head. Afterwards, turning to the young men, he spoke to the elder :

" Lean against the tapestry, Anne, so that you will not grow tired from standing ; this affair may be long."

" Long and good, I trust, sire," interrupted Catharine.

" You think, then, that Salcède will speak, mother ? " asked Henry.

" God, I hope, will give this confusion to our enemies. I say our enemies, for they are your enemies also, my daughter," she added, turning to the Queen, who grew pale, and lowered her gentle eyes.

The King shook his head as though in doubt. Then, turning again to Joyeuse, whom he saw was still standing in spite of his invitation :

" Come, Anne," said he, " do as I say ; lean against the wall, or on the arm of my chair.

" Your Majesty is indeed too good," said the young duke ; " but I will take advantage of the permission only when I actually grow tired."

" And we are not going to wait until you do, are we, brother ? " said Henry in a low voice.

" Do not worry," replied Anne, with his eyes rather than his voice.

" My son," said Catharine, " do I not see some trouble yonder, at the corner of the quay ? "

" What clear eyesight you have, mother ! Yes, indeed, I believe you are right. Oh, what bad eyes I have, and I am not old either ! "

" Sire," interrupted Joyeuse freely, " the tumult is caused by the people on the Place being driven back by the company of archers. The prisoner must be arriving."

" How flattering it is for kings to see a man quartered who has a drop of royal blood in his veins ! " said Catharine, and as she spoke she looked at Louise.

" Oh ! madame, pardon me, spare me ! " said the young queen with a despair she strove in vain to hide ; " no ! this monster does not belong to my family, and you never meant that he did."

"Certainly not," said the King; "and I am very sure that my mother did not mean to say that."

"Well," said Catharine sharply, "he belongs to the Lorraines, and the Lorraines belong to you, madame; I think so, at least. So this Salcède is a relation of yours, a very near one, in fact."

"That is to say," interrupted Joyeuse, with an honest indignation, which was the chief trait of his character, and which under all circumstances was directed against the one, whoever he was, who had aroused it; "that is to say that he is related to Monsieur de Guise, perhaps, but not to the Queen of France."

"Ah! are you there, Monsieur de Joyeuse?" said Catharine with indefinable hauteur, returning an insult for a contradiction. "Ah! are you there? I did not see you."

"I am here, not merely by the permission but by the order of the King, madame," replied Joyeuse, with a questioning glance at Henry. "It is not so diverting to see a man quartered that I should come to such a spectacle, were I not forced to do so."

"Joyeuse is right, madame," said Henry; "we are not here to discuss the Lorraines, nor De Guise, nor, above all, the Queen; we are here to see Monsieur de Salcède, an assassin who wished to kill my brother, cut into four pieces."

"I am unfortunate to-day," said Catharine, immediately giving in, which was her cleverest mode of attack, "I have made my daughter weep, and God forgive me! I believe I have made Monsieur de Joyeuse laugh."

"Ah! madame," cried Louise, seizing Catharine's hand, "is it possible that your Majesty despises my grief?"

"And my profound respect?" added Anne de Joyeuse, leaning on the arm of the royal chair.

"It is true, it is true," replied Catharine, sinking a final shaft into the heart of her daughter-in-law. "I ought to know how painful it is for you, my dear child, to see the plots of your Lorraine relatives revealed; and although you may not be in sympathy with them, you suffer none the less for this relationship."

"Ah! as to that, mother, it is somewhat true," said the King, trying to make peace among them; "for this time we know what to think of Monsieur de Guise's participation in the plot."

"But, sire," interrupted Louise of Lorraine, more boldly than she had as yet done, "your Majesty well knows that in becoming Queen of France I left my relatives far below the throne."

"Oh!" cried Anne de Joyeuse, "you see that I was not mistaken, sire; there is the victim arriving on the Place. *Corbleu!* what an ugly face!"

"He is afraid," said Catharine; "he will speak."

"If he has the strength for it," said the King. "See, mother, his head wobbles like that of a corpse."

"I cannot take my eyes from him, sire; he is horrible."

"How could you expect him to be beautiful — a man whose thoughts are so bad? Have I not explained to you, Anne, the secret connection between the physical and the moral, as Hippocrates and Galen understood and explained them?"

"I do not deny it, sire; but I am not a pupil of your strength, and I have sometimes seen very ugly men who were very brave soldiers. Is it not so, Henry?"

Joyeuse turned to his brother, as though to gain his approval; but Henry looked without seeing, listened without hearing; he was plunged in a deep reverie. It was the King, therefore, who answered for him.

"Well, *Mon Dieu!* my dear Anne," cried he, "who tells you that the man is not brave? He is, *pardieu!* like a bear, like a wolf, like a serpent. Do you not remember his deeds? He burned in his house a Norman gentleman, his enemy; he has fought ten times, and killed three of his adversaries; he has been caught while making counterfeit money, and for this act he has been condemned to death."

"So much so," said Catharine de Medicis, "that he has been pardoned by the intercession of Monsieur le Duc de Guise, your cousin, my daughter."

This time Louise had reached the limit of her strength; she contented herself with heaving a sigh.

"Well," said Joyeuse, "that is a well-filled existence which will soon be finished."

"I trust, Monsieur de Joyeuse," said Catharine, "that it will, on the contrary, be finished as slowly as possible."

"Madame," said Joyeuse, shaking his head, "I see yonder under that awning such strong horses which seem to me so impatient at being obliged to do nothing, that I do not believe

in a very long resistance of the muscles, tendons, and cartilages of Monsieur de Salcède."

"Yes, if they do not provide against such a case; but my son is merciful," added the Queen with one of those smiles which belonged to her alone; "he will have the assistants told to draw gently."

"And yet, madame," objected Queen Louise timidly, "I heard you say this morning to Madame de Mercœur that this wretched man would suffer only two draws."

"Yes, if he conducts himself well," said Catharine, "in that case he will be finished as quickly as possible; but you hear, my daughter, and I wish since you are interested in him that you could tell it to him; whether he conducts himself well concerns himself."

"Ah! madame, God has not given me the strength he gave you, therefore I have not much heart to see suffering."

"Well, do not look, my daughter."

Louise was silent.

The King had heard nothing; he was all eyes, for his assistants were occupied in lifting the culprit from the cart which had brought him, in order to place him on the small scaffold.

In the meantime the halberdiers, the archers, and the Swiss had cleared considerable space, so that around the scaffold there was room enough for every eye to distinguish Salcède in spite of the slight elevation of his funeral pile.

Salcède might have been thirty-four or thirty-five years old; he was strong and vigorous; the pallid features of his face, on which lay drops of perspiration and blood, grew animated as he looked around him with an indescribable expression, now of hope, now of despair.

At first he had turned his eyes toward the royal stand, but as if he had comprehended that it was death instead of pardon which was coming to him from that quarter, his gaze did not linger there.

It was to the crowd he looked, it was in the heart of that stormy sea that he searched with burning eyes, his soul trembling on his lips. The crowd was silent.

Salcède was no common assassin. Salcède, in the first place, was of good birth, since Catharine de Medicis, who was much better informed in genealogy than she appeared to be, had discovered a drop of royal blood in his veins; besides, Salcède had been a captain of some renown. That hand, bound by a shame-

ful cord, had valiantly carried a sword; that livid brow on which were painted the terrors of death, terrors which the victim would no doubt have hidden deep down in his soul, if hope had not held too large a place there, — that livid brow had harbored great projects.

From what we have just said it happened that for very many of the spectators Salcède was a hero; for many others, a victim; some, indeed, looked upon him as an assassin, for it is with difficulty that a crowd, in its scorn, places in the rank of ordinary criminals those who have attempted great murders which are registered in the book of history as well as in that of justice.

Thus they whispered in the crowd that Salcède was born of a race of warriors, that his father had fought against Monsieur the Cardinal de Lorraine, which valor had cost him a glorious death in the midst of the massacre of St. Bartholomew; that later, the son, forgetful of this death or rather sacrificing his hatred to a certain ambition for which the people always have some sympathy, that this son, we say, had entered into a compact with Spain and with the De Guises to destroy in Flanders the growing power of the Duc d'Anjou, so deeply hated by the French.

They mentioned his relations with Baza and Balouin, the supposed authors of the plot which had almost cost the life of Duc François, brother of Henry III.; they cited the skill which Salcède had displayed throughout the whole proceeding in order to escape the wheel, the gibbet, and the stake, on which the blood of his accomplices was still smoking; he alone, by revelations false and full of artifice, the Lorraines said, had allured his judges to such a point, that, in order to know more about it, the Duc d'Anjou had spared him temporarily, and had had him sent to France, instead of having him beheaded at Antwerp or Brussels. It is true that he had ended by arriving at the same result, but on the journey, which was the aim of his revelations, Salcède had hoped to be rescued by his partisans; unfortunately for him he had calculated without Monsieur de Bellièvre, who entrusted with this precious charge had kept such good watch that neither Spaniards, nor Lorraines, nor Leaguers had been able to approach within a mile of him.

Salcède in the prison had hoped; he had hoped at the torture; in the cart he had still hoped; now on the scaffold he

was hoping. It was not that he lacked courage or resignation; but he was of those long-lived creatures who defend themselves to their last breath with that tenacity and vigor which the human strength does not always attain in minds of less power.

The King was no more unconscious of this constant thought of Salcède than were the people.

Catharine, on her part, anxiously studied the slightest movement of the unfortunate young man; but she was too far away to follow the direction of his eyes and to notice their continual play.

On the arrival of the prisoner there rose in the crowd, as by magic, tiers of men, women, and children. Each time that he perceived a new head above the moving level, already measured by his vigorous eye, Salcède analyzed it thoroughly in the glance of a second, which sufficed as well as the examination of an hour. To this over-excited organization the last hour becomes very precious, increasing every faculty ten or rather a hundred-fold. After this glance, this lightning-flash hurled upon the new, unknown face, Salcède grew sad and turned his attention elsewhere. However, the executioner had begun to take possession of him, and was binding him by the middle of his body to the centre of the scaffold. Already, even, at a sign from Maître Tanchon, lieutenant of the short robe and commander of the execution, two archers, breaking through the crowd, had gone for the horses.

Under other circumstances or for any other purpose the archers would not have been able to advance a step through the midst of that compact mass; but the people knew what the archers were going to do, and they pressed back and made way, as, on a crowded stage, one always makes room for the actors of important parts.

At this moment there was some commotion at the door of the royal box, and the doorkeeper, raising the tapestry, announced to their Majesties that President Brisson and four councillors, one of whom was the reporter of the affair, desired the honor of conversing a moment with the King on the subject of the execution.

"That is well," said the King.

Then turning to Catharine:

"Well, mother!" he continued, "you are going to be satisfied!"

Catharine gave a slight nod, in evidence of her approval.

"Let the gentlemen enter," said the King.

"Sire, a favor," demanded Joyeuse.

"Speak, Joyeuse, said the King, "and provided that it is not for the condemned man" —

"Reassure yourself, sire."

"I am listening."

"Sire, there is one thing the sight of which especially wounds my brother and myself, that is the red robes and the black; would your Majesty therefore be good enough to let us retire?"

"What! you are so little interested in my affairs, Monsieur de Joyeuse, that you ask to retire at such a time?" cried Henry.

"Do not believe that, sire; all that touches your Majesty is of deep interest to me; but I have a wretched constitution, and the weakest woman is, on this point, stronger than I; I cannot see an execution without being ill for a week. But as there is scarcely any one but myself who laughs at court since my brother no longer laughs, I do not know why, think what would become of this poor Louvre, already so sad, if I took it into my head to make it more melancholy still. So, as a favor, sire" —

"You want to leave me, Anne?" said Henry, in a tone of indescribable sadness.

"The deuce, sire! you are unreasonable; an execution on the Grève is vengeance and a spectacle in one, and what a spectacle! in which, contrary to me, you are the most interested; vengeance and the spectacle are not sufficient for you, it seems necessary for you at the same time to enjoy the weakness of your friends."

"Remain, Joyeuse, remain; you will see that it is interesting."

"I do not doubt it; I even fear, as I have told your Majesty, that the interest may be carried to a point which I cannot stand; therefore, you will permit, will you not, sire?" And Joyeuse made a movement towards the door.

"Well," said Henry III., with a sigh, "do as you please; my destiny is to live alone."

And the King turned, with frowning brow, to his mother, fearing that she had overheard the conversation which had just taken place between him and his favorite.

Catharine's hearing was as good as her eyesight; but when she did not wish to hear, no ear was duller than hers.

Meanwhile, Joyeuse had leaned over to his brother and had whispered to him :

"Quick, quick, Du Bouchage! While the councillors are coming in, let us slip behind their wide robes and get away; the King says 'yes' now; in five minutes he may say 'no.'

"Thanks, thanks, brother," answered the young man; "I am like you, in haste to leave."

"Well, well, here come the ravens; disappear, tender nightingale."

And behind the councillors one might have seen the two young men fleeing like two rapid shadows. Behind them the curtains fell in heavy folds.

When the King turned his head they had already disappeared. Henry heaved a sigh and kissed his little dog.

CHAPTER V.

THE EXECUTION.

The councillors remained standing at the back of the King's box, in silence, waiting for the King to address them.

The King waited a minute, then turning towards them :

"Well, gentlemen, what news?" he asked. "Good morning, Monsieur Brisson."

"Sire," replied the president, with the easy dignity which at court they called his Huguenot courtesy, "we come at the desire of Monsieur de Thou, to beg your Majesty to spare the life of the culprit. He has, no doubt, some revelations to make; and, by promising him his life, these would be obtained."

"But," said the King, "have not the revelations been obtained, Monsieur President?"

"Yes, sire, in part; is that sufficient for your Majesty?"

"I know what I know, monsieur."

"Your Majesty knows, then, what to think of the participation of Spain in this affair?"

"Of Spain? Yes, Monsieur President, and of many other powers."

"It would be important to prove this participation, sire."

"Therefore," interrupted Catharine, "the King has the intention, Monsieur President, to suspend the execution, if the culprit will sign a confession corresponding to his deposition before the judge who put the question to him under torture."

Brisson questioned the King with a glance and a gesture.

"Such is my intention," said Henry, "and I no longer hide it; you may be assured of it, Monsieur Brisson, and may have the culprit informed of it by your lieutenant of the robe."

"Your Majesty has nothing further to recommend?"

"Nothing. But no variation in the confession, or I withdraw my word. It is public, it must be complete."

"Yes, sire, with the names of the compromised persons?"

"With the names, all the names!"

"Even if these names, by the confession of the prisoner, should be tainted with high treason and revolt against the chief head?"

"Even if these names should be those of my nearest relatives!" said the King.

"It shall be done as your Majesty orders."

"I will explain myself, Monsieur Brisson, so there may be no misunderstanding. They shall carry paper and pens to the prisoner, he shall write his confession, showing publicly by this that he refers himself to our mercy. Afterwards, we will see."

"But I may promise?"

"Oh, yes! promise always."

"Come, gentlemen," said the president, dismissing the councillors, and having respectfully saluted the King he went out to join them.

"He will speak, sire," said Louise de Lorraine, trembling from head to foot; "he will speak, and your Majesty will pardon. See how the foam comes to his lips."

"No, no! he is looking for something," said Catharine, "he is looking for something, nothing else. What is he looking for?"

"*Parbleu!*" said Henry III., "it is not difficult to guess; he is looking for Monsieur le Duc de Parme, Monsieur le Duc de Guise; he is looking for monsieur my brother, the most Catholic king."

"Yes, seek! seek! Wait! Do you think that the Place de Grève is an easier place in which to hide than the route from

Flanders? Do you think that I have not a hundred Bellièvres here to prevent you from descending from the scaffold to which one alone has brought you?"

Salcède had seen the archers leave in order to bring the horses; he had seen the president and the councillors in the King's box, then he had seen them disappear; he inferred that the King had given the order for his execution. It was then that there appeared on his blue lips the bloody foam noticed by the young queen: the wretched man, in the mortal impatience which was devouring him, bit his lips until the blood came.

"No one! no one!" he murmured, "not one of those who promised me help! Cowards! cowards! cowards!"

The lieutenant Tanchon approached the scaffold and addressed the executioner.

"Make yourself ready, master," said he. The executioner made a sign to the other end of the Place, and one could see the horses cutting their way through the crowd, and leaving behind them a tumultuous furrow, which, like that of the sea, closed behind them.

This furrow was produced by the spectators who drove back or bore down upon the rapid passage of the horses; but the breach in the wall closed again instantly, and at times the first became the last, and *vice versa*, for the strongest pushed into the empty space.

One might then have seen, as the horses passed by, in the corner of the Rue de la Vannerie, a handsome young man jump down from the post on which he was standing, urged forward by a child who appeared to be scarcely fifteen or sixteen years old, and who seemed very eager over this terrible spectacle.

It was our acquaintance the mysterious page and the Vicomte Ernauton de Carmainges.

"Oh! quick, quick," whispered the page into the ear of his companion, "throw yourself into the opening; there is not a minute to lose."

"But we shall be suffocated," replied Ernauton, "you are crazy, my little friend!"

"I want to see, to see close by," said the page, in so imperious a tone that it was easy to perceive that this order came from lips which were accustomed to command.

Ernauton obeyed.

"Press close to the horses, press close to the horses," said the page; "do not leave an inch between you, or we shall never arrive there."

"But before we arrive there you will be torn to pieces."

"Don't trouble about me. Forward! forward!"

"The horses will kick!"

"Take hold of the tail of the last; a horse never kicks when one holds him in that way."

Ernauton, in spite of himself, submitted to the strange influence of the child; he obeyed, and seized the tail of the horse while the page clung to his belt.

Through the midst of the crowd, undulating like a sea, difficult as a thicket, leaving here a flap of a cloak, there a fragment of a doublet, further on the ruffle of a shirt, they arrived at the same time as the horses, to within three feet of the scaffold on which Salcède was writhing in the convulsions of despair.

"Have we arrived?" whispered the young man, gasping and out of breath, as he felt Ernauton stop.

"Yes," replied the vicomte, "fortunately, for I had come to the end of my strength."

"I do not see."

"Come in front of me."

"No, no, not yet. . . . What are they doing?"

"Making slip-knots at the end of the cords."

"And he, what is he doing?"

"He, who?"

"The prisoner."

"His eyes are turning in every direction, as one who is watching for something."

The horses were near enough to the scaffold for the assistants of the executioner to fasten the tracer fixed to their collars to the feet and wrists of Salcède.

Salcède gave a groan when he felt around his ankles the rough contact of the cords, which a slip-knot drew tight about his flesh. He then directed a supreme, an indefinable glance over the whole of that immense Place, over the hundred thousand spectators which he embraced in the range of his vision.

"Monsieur," said the lieutenant Tanchon to him politely, "will it please you to speak to the people before we proceed?"

And he bent over the ear of the prisoner to add in a low tone:

"A good confession . . . to save your life."

Salcède looked at him, into the depths of his soul.

This glance was so eloquent that it seemed to force the truth from the heart of Tanchon, and cause it to mount to his eyes, whence it blazed forth.

Salcède was not deceived by it; he understood that the lieutenant was sincere and would do what he promised.

"You see," went on Tanchon, "they abandon you; there is no other hope in this world than that which I offer you."

"Well!" said Salcède, with a hoarse sigh, "see that there is silence; I am ready to speak."

"It is a confession, written and signed, that the King demands."

"Then untie my hands and give me a pen; I will write."

"Your confession?"

"My confession, yes."

Tanchon, transported with joy, had but to make a sign; the case had been foreseen. An archer held everything ready; he passed to him the inkstand, pens, and paper, which Tanchon placed on the floor of the scaffold.

At the same time they let out about three feet of the cord which bound Salcède's right wrist and raised him on the platform, that he might be able to write.

Salcède, thus seated, began by breathing hard and by making use of his hand to wipe his lips and push back his hair, from which drops of perspiration fell to his knees.

"Come, come," said Tanchon, "make yourself easy, and write everything."

"Oh, have no fear," replied Salcède, reaching out his hand toward the pen; "rest assured, I shall not forget those who forget me."

And at this word he hazarded a last glance.

Without doubt the moment had come for the page to show himself, for seizing the hand of Ernauton:

"Monsieur," said he, "as a favor, take me in your arms and raise me above the heads of those who prevent me from seeing."

"Ah! but you are insatiable, young man, in truth."

"Just this favor, monsieur."

"You abuse."

"I must see the condemned man, do you hear? I must see him."

Then no doubt, as Ernauton did not answer quickly enough to the injunction:

"In pity, monsieur, as a favor!" said he, "I beseech you."

The child was no longer a capricious tyrant, but an irresistible suppliant. Ernauton raised him in his arms, not without some surprise at the delicacy of the body he held in his hands.

The head of the page thus rose above the other heads.

Just as Salcède had taken the pen, in concluding his glance around, he saw the face of the young man and sat stupefied.

At that instant the two fingers of the page were laid on his lips; at once an indescribable joy spread over the face of the victim, like the joy of the rich man when Lazarus let fall a drop of water upon his parched tongue. He had recognized the signal for which he had been waiting with impatience, and which announced help to him.

After several seconds' contemplation Salcède seized the paper which Tanchon, anxious at his hesitation, offered him, and began to write with feverish energy.

"He writes! he writes!" murmured the crowd.

"He writes!" repeated the queen mother in evident joy.

"He writes," said the King. "*Mordieu*, I will pardon him."

Suddenly Salcède interrupted himself to look at the young man.

The latter repeated the same sign, and Salcède began to write again. Then after a short interval he once more interrupted himself to look again. This time the page made a sign with his fingers and with his head.

"Have you finished?" said Tanchon, who had not lost sight of the paper.

"Yes," said Salcède, mechanically.

"Sign, then."

Salcède signed without turning his eyes on the paper, for they were fixed on the young man.

Tanchon held out his hand toward the confession.

"For the King, for the King alone!" said Salcède.

And he handed the paper to the lieutenant of the short robe, with hesitation, like a conquered soldier who gives up his last weapon.

"If you have confessed everything," said the lieutenant, "you are safe, Monsieur Salcède."

A smile of irony mingled with anxiety showed on the lips

of the victim, who seemed to question impatiently his mysterious interlocutor.

At length Ernauton, fatigued, wished to be relieved of his troublesome burden; he opened his arms; the page slipped to the ground.

With him disappeared the vision which had sustained the condemned man.

When Salcède no longer saw him, he looked about for him; then, as though distracted, he cried:

"Well! well!"

No one answered him.

"Ah! quick! quick! Hurry!" said he; "the King has the paper; he is about to read!"

No one stirred.

The King quickly unfolded the confession.

"Oh! a thousand devils!" cried Salcède. "Would they deceive me? Yet I recognized her perfectly. It was she, it was she!"

Scarcely had the King read the first lines than he became furious with indignation.

Then he grew pale, and cried:

"Oh, the wretch! Oh, the wicked man!"

"What is it, my son?" demanded Catharine.

"He retracts, mother; he pretends never to have confessed anything."

"And then?"

"Then he declares Messieurs de Guise innocent, and strangers to all plots."

"Right," stammered Catharine, "if it is true."

"He lies!" cried the King; "he lies like a heathen."

"How do you know that, my son? Messieurs de Guise are perhaps calumniated. The judges in their too great zeal have perhaps wrongly interpreted their depositions."

"Well, madame!" cried Henry, no longer able to control himself. "I heard everything."

"You, my son?"

"Yes, I."

"And when was that, if you please?"

"When the victim was undergoing the torture — I was behind a curtain; I did not lose a single one of his words; and each sank into my memory as a nail under a hammer."

"Well! make him speak under the rack, since the rack is necessary for him; order the horses to draw."

Henry, beside himself with anger, raised his hand.

The lieutenant Tanchon repeated the sign.

The ropes had already been tied to the four limbs of the victim ; four men had jumped upon the four horses ; four blows of the whip had resounded, and the four horses had bounded in opposite directions.

Instantly a horrible cracking and a fearful cry rose from the floor of the scaffold. The spectators saw the limbs of the wretched Salcède turn blue, lengthen, and spout forth blood ; his face was no longer that of a human being ; it was the mask of a demon.

"Ah, treason ! treason !" he cried. "Ah ! I will speak, I will speak ; I will tell all ! Ah, cursed duch" — the voice rose above the neighing of the horses and the noise of the crowd ; but suddenly it ceased.

"Stop ! Stop !" cried Catharine.

It was too late. The head of Salcède, lately rigid with suffering and fury, fell suddenly to the floor of the scaffold.

"Let him speak," shouted the queen mother. "Stop ! stop !"

The eyes of Salcède were excessively dilated, fixed, and obstinately plunged into the crowd where the page had appeared. Tanchon cleverly followed their direction.

But Salcède could no longer speak ; he was dead.

Tanchon in a low voice gave some orders to his archers, who dived into the crowd in the direction indicated by the denouncing eyes of Salcède.

"I am discovered," said the young page into Ernauton's ear ; "for pity's sake, help me, assist me, monsieur ; they are coming ! They are coming !"

"But what more do you wish ?"

"To flee ; do you not see that it is I whom they seek ?"

"But who are you, then ?"

"A woman . . . save me ! protect me !"

Ernauton grew pale, but generosity prevailed over astonishment and fear.

He placed his *protégée* before him ; with great blows forced a passage, and pushed her as far as the corner of the Rue du Mouton, toward an open door.

The incognita sprang forward and disappeared within the open door which instantly closed behind her.

He had not had time even to ask her name or as to where he could find her again.

But on disappearing, the young page, as though she had divined his thought, had made him a sign full of promises.

Once more free, Ernauton returned to the centre of the Place, and embraced at a single glance the scaffold and the royal box.

Salcède was stretched stiff and livid on the scaffold.

Catharine was standing in the box pale and trembling.

"My son," said she at length, wiping the perspiration from her brow, "my son, you will do well to change your executioner; he is a Leaguer!"

"And how do you know that, mother?" asked Henry.

"Look! look!"

"Well, I am looking."

"Salcède suffered only one pull, and he is dead."

"Because he was too sensitive to suffering."

"No! no!" said Catharine, with a smile of scorn called forth by her son's want of perspicuity; "it was because he was strangled from below the scaffold with a fine cord, just as he was about to accuse those who let him die. Have the corpse examined by a clever doctor, and I am sure you will find about his neck the circle which the cord has left there."

"You are right," said Henry, whose eyes shone for an instant, "my cousin De Guise is better served than I."

"Hush! hush! my son," said Catharine, "no noise, they will laugh at us; for this time too it is a lost game."

"Joyeuse did well to go and amuse himself elsewhere," said the King; "one can no longer count on anything in this world, not even on executions. Let us go, ladies, let us go."

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO JOYEUSES.

Messieurs de Joyeuse, as we have seen, had stolen away during this scene, behind the Hôtel de Ville, and leaving with the carriages of the King their lackeys, who were waiting for them with the horses, walked side by side through the streets of that populous quarter, which that day were deserted, so great was the number of spectators that crowded the Place de Grève.

Once outside they walked with their arms about each other, but without speaking.

Henry, but lately so joyous, was preoccupied and almost sad. Anne seemed restless and as though embarrassed by his brother's silence.

It was he who first spoke.

"Well, Henry," said he, "whither are you taking me?"

"I am not taking you, brother, I am walking in spite of myself," replied Henry, as though he had suddenly wakened.

"Do you want to go anywhere, brother?"

"And you?"

Henry smiled sadly.

"Oh, I!" said he, "it little concerns me where I go."

"Yet you go somewhere every evening," said Anne, "for every evening you go out at the same hour, and you return scarcely before midnight, and sometimes not at all."

"Are you questioning me, brother?" asked Henry, with a charming gentleness, combined with a certain respect for his elder brother.

"I question you?" said Anne. "God forbid! secrets are for those who keep them."

"If you wish it, brother," replied Henry, "I will have no secrets from you; you well know this."

"You will not have secrets from me, Henry?"

"Never, brother; are you not at once my lord and my friend?"

"Well! I thought you had some secrets from me, who am only a poor layman; I thought you had our learned brother, that pillar of theology, that torch of religion, that erudite architect in cases of court conscience, who some day will be cardinal; that you confided in him, and that you found in him at once confession, absolution, and, who knows? — and advice; for in our family," added Anne, laughing, "one is good for everything; you know this; witness our very dear father."

Henry du Bouchage seized the hand of his brother and pressed it affectionately.

"You are to me more than director, more than confessor, more than father, my dear Anne," said he, "I tell you again, you are my friend."

"Then, my friend, why from being gay as you used to be, have I seen you little by little becoming sad, and why, instead

of going out in the day-time, you now no longer go out, save at night?"

"Brother, I am not sad," replied Henry, smiling.

"What are you, then?"

"I am in love."

"Good! And this preoccupation?"

"Comes from my constantly thinking of my love."

"And you sigh in telling me that?"

"Yes."

"You sigh? you, Henry, Count du Bouchage; you, the brother of Joyeuse; you, whom evil tongues call the third king of France . . . you know that Monsieur de Guise is the second, if indeed not the first . . . you who are rich; you who are handsome, who, like me, will be peer of France, and, like me, duke, the first chance I have; you are in love; you think, and you sigh; you sigh, you, who took for your emblem *Hilariter* [joyously]!"

"My dear Anne, neither all these gifts of the past nor all these promises for the future have ever counted with me among the things which were to make my happiness. I have no ambition."

"That is to say you no longer have any."

"Or at least that I do not pursue the things of which you speak."

"Just now, perhaps; but later you will return to them."

"Never, brother; I desire nothing, I want nothing."

"But you are wrong, brother. When one is called Joyeuse, that is one of the most beautiful names in France; when one has a brother the favorite of the King, one desires everything, one wants everything, and one has everything."

Henry dropped his blond head, and shook it sadly.

"Come," said Anne, "here we are quite alone, quite lost. The devil take me! we have crossed the water so far that we are on the Pont de la Tournelle, and this without having been seen. I do not believe that on this lonely strand, with this cold north wind, near this green water, any one will come to listen to us. Have you anything serious to tell me, Henry?"

"Nothing, nothing, except that I am in love, and you know that already, brother, since just now I told you."

"But, the devil! that is not serious," said Anne, stamping his foot. "I too, by the pope, am in love!"

"Not as I am, brother."

"I too think sometimes of my mistress."

"Yes, but not always."

"I too have troubles and even griefs."

"Yes, but you have joys also, for you are loved."

"Oh! I have great obstacles too; they demand great mysteries of me."

"They demand? You said 'they demand,' brother. If your mistress demands she is yours."

"No doubt she is mine, that is to say, mine and Monsieur de Mayenne's — confidence for confidence, Henry — I have, indeed, the mistress of that *roué*, Mayenne, a girl madly in love with me, who would leave Mayenne instantly if she were not afraid that he would kill her; it is his custom to kill women, you know. Then I detest these Guises, and it amuses me to have a good time at the expense of one of them. Well! I tell you, and repeat it, I have troubles sometimes, and quarrels, but I do not become as sad as a Carthusian friar about it; I have no swollen eyes over it. I continue to laugh, if not always, at least from time to time. Come, tell me whom you love, Henry; is your mistress beautiful, at least?"

"Alas! brother, she is not my mistress."

"Is she beautiful?"

"Too beautiful."

"Her name?"

"I do not know it."

"Come, now!"

"On my honor!"

"My friend, I begin to think it is more serious than I had believed. It is not sadness, by the pope! it is madness."

"She has spoken to me only once, or rather she has spoken only once in my hearing, and from that time I have not even heard the sound of her voice."

"And you have not made inquiries?"

"Of whom?"

"How, of whom? Of the neighbors."

"She lives in a house by herself, and no one knows her."

"Ah! but is she a shadow?"

"She is a woman, tall and beautiful as a nymph, serious and grave as the angel Gabriel."

"How did you become acquainted with her? Where did you meet her?"

"One day I was following a young girl at the cross-ways of the Gypecienne; I entered the little garden which adjoins the church. There is a bench there under the trees. Have you ever been in this garden, brother?"

"Never; but no matter, go on; there is a bench there under the trees. Well?"

"Night was beginning to fall; I lost sight of the young girl, and in looking for her, I came upon this bench."

"Go on, go on; I am listening."

"I caught a glimpse of a woman's dress at one end; I held out my hands.

"'Pardon, monsieur,' suddenly said the voice of a man whom I had not seen, 'pardon.'

"And the hand of the man pressed me back gently but firmly."

"He dared to touch you, Joyeuse?"

"Listen: the man had his face hidden in a sort of monk's hood. I took him for a priest; moreover, he impressed me by the kind and courteous tone of his words, for as he spoke he pointed out to me with his finger, ten feet away, the woman whose white garment had drawn me in that direction, and who was kneeling before the stone bench as if it had been an altar.

"I stopped, brother. It was toward the beginning of September that this adventure happened to me; the air was warm, the violets and the roses planted by friends on the tombs of the enclosure gave out their delicate perfume; the moon broke through a white cloud behind the steeple of the church, and the windows began to shine with silver at the top, while at the bottom they were like gold, from the reflection of the lighted candles. My friend, whether it was the majesty of the place or her own personal dignity, this kneeling woman shone for me in the shadow like a statue of marble, and as though she had been actually carved in marble. She filled me with an indescribable feeling of reverence which made me cold at heart.

"I gazed at her eagerly.

"She bent over the bench, encircled it with her two arms, put her lips to it, and at once I saw her shoulders heave beneath the strain of her sighs and sobs; never have you heard such sobs, brother; never has the sharp steel so sadly torn a heart! Still weeping, she kissed the stone with an abandon

that undid me; her tears moved me; her kisses drove me mad!

"But it was she, by the pope, who was mad!" said Joyeuse; "does one kiss a stone thus, and sob in that way for nothing? Oh! it was a deep grief which made her sob; it was an intense love which caused her to kiss that stone; only whom did she love? For whom was she weeping? For whom was she praying? I do not know."

"But the man — did you not question him?"

"Yes."

"And what did he say?"

"That she had lost her husband."

"Does one weep like that for a husband?" said Joyeuse. "*Pardieu*, a fine answer; and you were satisfied with it?"

"I had to be, since he was not willing to give me any other."

"But the man himself, who is he?"

"A sort of servant, who lives with her."

"His name?"

"He refused to tell me."

"Young? Old?"

"He might be twenty-eight or thirty."

"Well, afterwards? She did not remain all night praying and weeping, did she?"

"No; when she had finished weeping, that is to say, when she had exhausted her tears, when she had used up her lips on the bench, she rose, brother; there was in this woman such mysterious sadness, that instead of approaching her as I would have done to any other woman, I drew back; it was she, therefore, who came to me or rather in my direction, for she did not even see me. Then a ray of moonlight fell on her face, and it seemed to me illumined, resplendent; it had resumed its severe sadness; not another contraction, not a quiver, not a tear; only the wet lines they had left. Her eyes alone still shone; her lips opened gently to breathe in the life which a moment ago had seemed ready to abandon her. She took a few steps in a slow, feeble way, like those who walk in their sleep; the man, thereupon, ran to her and guided her, for she seemed to have forgotten that she was walking on earth. Oh, my brother! what startling beauty, what superhuman power! I have never seen anything on earth like her; sometimes only in my dreams, when heaven has opened, there have descended visions similar to this reality."

"Afterwards, Henry, afterwards," said Anne, in spite of himself taking an interest in the story at which at first he had intended to laugh.

"Oh! it is soon finished, brother, her servant spoke a few words to her in a low tone, whereupon she lowered her veil; doubtless he told her that I was there, but she did not even glance in my direction; she lowered her veil, and I saw her no more, brother. It seemed to me that the sky had become obscured and that she was no longer a living creature, but a shadow escaped from the tombs, which, among the deep grass, glided silently before me.

"She stepped out of the enclosure; I followed her.

"From time to time the man turned round and saw me, for I did not hide myself, completely carried away as I was; what would you have? I had still the old vulgar habits in my mind, the old gross leaven in my heart."

"What do you mean, Henry?" asked Anne; "I do not understand."

The young man smiled.

"I mean, brother," said he, "that my youth has been unrestrained; that I have often thought I was in love, and that all women, up to that moment, were, for me, women to whom I could offer my love."

"Oh! Oh! What is this one, then?" said Joyeuse, striving to resume his gayety, which was somewhat damped in spite of himself by his brother's confidence. "Take care, Henry, you are beginning to wander; was not this one a woman of flesh and bone?"

"Brother," said the young man, seizing the hand of Joyeuse in a feverish grasp, "brother," said he, so low that his breath scarcely reached the ear of the elder one, "as surely as God hears me, I do not know whether she is a creature of this world or not."

"By the pope!" said the other, "you would frighten me if a Joyeuse ever could be afraid."

Then trying to resume his gayety: "But," said he, "at least she walks, weeps, and kisses very well, — you yourself told me so, — and it seems to me that it is a good enough augury, dear friend. But that is not all; come, afterwards, afterwards."

"Afterwards there is very little. I followed her; she did not try to avoid me, to turn aside from the road, or to take a

wrong road in order to throw me off the track. She did not seem even to think of that."

"Well, where does she live?"

"Beside the Bastille, in the Rue de Lesdigvières; at the door her companion turned round and saw me."

"You made him some sign, then, to give him to understand that you wished to speak to him?"

"I did not dare; what I am about to tell you is ridiculous, but the servant over-awed me almost as much as the mistress."

"Never mind; you entered the house?"

"No, brother."

"In truth, Henry, I have half a mind to disown you for a Joyeuse. But at least you returned the following day?"

"Yes, but in vain — in vain to the Gypecienne, in vain to the Rue de Lesdigvières."

"She had disappeared?"

"Like a shadow that had faded away."

"But finally you made inquiries?"

"The street has few inhabitants. No one could satisfy me. I watched for the man in order to question him. He reappeared no more than did the woman. However, a light which I saw shining in the evening through the shutters consoled me by indicating that she was still there. I employed a hundred means to enter the house: letters, messages, flowers, gifts — everything failed. One night the light disappeared and returned no more; the lady, wearied no doubt by my pursuit, had left the Rue de Lesdigvières; no one knew her changed abode."

"Yet you found her again, this beautiful savage?"

"Chance permitted it; I am unjust, brother, it is Providence who does not wish one to drag along such an existence. Listen, for in truth it is strange. I was passing down the Rue de Bussy, two weeks ago, at midnight; you know, brother, that the fire regulations are very strict; well! not only did I see flames at the windows of a house, but a real fire which was beginning to break out on the second story. I rapped loudly on the door; a man appeared at the window. 'Your house is on fire!' I cried. 'Silence! for pity's sake,' said he, 'silence! I am trying to put it out.' 'Do you want me to call the watch?' 'No, no, in Heaven's name, call no one!' 'But perhaps we could help you?' 'Will you come in, then, and you will render me a service for which I will be

grateful to you all my life.' 'And how shall I get in?' 'Here is the key of the door.' And he threw me the key from the window. I rapidly mounted the stairs, and entered the room which was the seat of the fire. It was the floor that was burning; I was in the laboratory of a chemist. In making some experiment, an inflammable liquid had been spilled on the floor; hence the fire. When I entered, the man had it already under control, so that I could examine him. He was twenty-eight or thirty years old; at least he appeared to me to be of this age. A frightful scar furrowed the half of one cheek, another had ploughed its way across his skull; his bushy beard hid the rest of his face. 'I thank you, monsieur, but as you see, it is all over now; if you are as gallant a man as you seem to be, have the goodness to retire, for my mistress may enter at any moment, and she would be irritated to see a stranger in my house, or rather in her house, at this hour.' The sound of this voice rendered me speechless, and almost petrified me. I opened my lips to cry: 'You are the man of the Gypecienne, the man of the Rue de Lesdigvières, the man of the unknown lady!' For you remember, brother, that he was covered with a hood, so that I did not see his face, and had merely heard his voice. I was about to tell him this, to question him, to beg him, when suddenly a door opened and a woman entered. 'What is the matter, Rémy?' she asked, pausing majestically on the threshold, 'and why this noise?' Oh! brother, it was she, more beautiful still in the dying flames of the fire than she had seemed to me in the light of the moon! It was she, it was this woman the constant thought of whom was eating my heart away. At the cry I gave, the servant regarded me more closely.

"'Thanks, monsieur,' said he, again. 'Thanks; but as you see, the fire is extinguished. Go, I beg you, go.'

"'My friend,' said I to him, 'you send me away very roughly.'

"'Madame,' said the servant, 'it is he.'

"'He? Who?' she asked.

"'The young cavalier whom we met in the garden of the Gypecienne, and who followed us to the Rue de Lesdigvières.'

She fixed her eyes on me, and by this look I understood that she saw me for the first time. 'Monsieur,' said she, 'as a favor, go away!' I hesitated, I longed to speak, to implore; but words failed me; I stood motionless and mute, gazing at her.

"'Take care, monsieur,' said the servant with greater sadness than severity, 'take care, or you will compel madame to flee a second time.' 'Ah! God forbid!' I exclaimed, bowing; 'but, madame, I do not offend you?' She did not answer me. As insensible, as mute, as cold as though she had not heard me, she turned away, and I saw her disappear gradually in the dark, descending the steps of a staircase, on which her footfall made no more noise than that of a phantom."

"And that was all?" asked Joyeuse.

"That was all. The servant conducted me to the door, saying: 'Forget, monsieur, in the name of Jesus and the Virgin Mary; forget, I beg you!' I fled, distracted, half wild, stupefied, pressing my head between my hands, and asking myself if I were not going mad. Since then I have gone every evening to that street, and that was why, as we started from the Hôtel de Ville, my steps very naturally turned in that direction; every evening, as I said, I go to that street, I hide in an angle of a house which is opposite hers, beneath a little balcony, the shadow of which completely conceals me; once in ten times I see a light in the chamber which she occupies; there is my life; there is my happiness."

"What happiness!" cried Joyeuse.

"Alas! I should lose it if I desired more."

"But if you lose yourself by this resignation?"

"Brother," said Henry, with a mournful smile; "what would you have? I am happy thus."

"It is impossible!"

"What do you mean? Happiness is relative; I know that she is there, that she lives there, that she breathes there; I see her through the wall; or rather I seem to see her; if she were to leave this house, if I were to pass another two weeks like those I spent when I had lost her, I should go mad, or become a monk."

"No, *mordieu!* There are already enough madmen and monks in the family; let us stop it now, my dear friend."

"No observations, Anne, no raillery; observations would be useless, raillery would effect nothing."

"And who is speaking to you of observations or raillery?"

"Very well. But" —

"Let me tell you one thing."

"What?"

"That you have been taken in like an inexperienced schoolboy."

"I made neither combinations nor calculations, I have not been taken in, I gave myself up to something which was stronger than I. When a current bears you away, it is better to follow the current than to struggle against it."

"And if it leads to some abyss?"

"You must fall into it, brother."

"This is your idea?"

"Yes."

"It is not mine, and in your place" —

"What would you have done, Anne?"

"Enough, certainly, to have discovered her name, her age. In your place" —

"Anne, Anne, you do not know her."

"No, but I know you. Why, Henry, you had fifty thousand crowns which I gave you, besides the hundred thousand which the King made me a present of at his fête" —

"They are still in my chest, Anne. Not one is missing."

"*Mordieu!* So much the worse! If they were not in your chest the woman would be in your alcove."

"Oh, brother!"

"There is no 'Oh, brother!' about it; a servant is usually bought for ten crowns, a good one for a hundred, an excellent one for a thousand, a marvellous one for three thousand. Let us see, now. Let us suppose this one the phœnix of servants; let us imagine him the model of fidelity. Yet with the help of twenty thousand pounds, by the pope! he would be yours. Then there remain one hundred and thirty thousand pounds to pay the phœnix of women, delivered by the phœnix of servants. Henry, my friend, you are a ninny."

"Anne," said Henry, sighing, "there are people who do not sell themselves; there are hearts which even a king is not rich enough to buy."

Joyeuse grew calm.

"Well, I admit that," said he; "but there are none who do not give themselves."

"Well?"

"Well? What have you done that the heart of this cold beauty should give itself to you?"

"I have a conviction, Anne, that I have done all that I could do."

"Well, then, Count du Bouchage, you are mad! You see a woman sad, shut up, grieving, and you make yourself more

sad, more of a recluse, more given to grieving; that is, more tiresome than she herself! In truth you spoke of the ordinary ways of love, and you are as commonplace as a police officer. She is alone; be company for her. She is sad; be gay. She mourns; console her and make up for her loss."

"Impossible, brother."

"Have you tried?"

"Why do it?"

"Well! If only to try. You are in love, you say?"

"I know no words in which to express my love."

"Well, in two weeks you shall have your mistress."

"Brother!"

"Faith of a Joyeuse! You have not given up hope, I trust?"

"No, for I have never hoped."

"At what hour do you see her?"

"At what hour do I see her?"

"Yes."

"But I tell you that I do not see her, brother."

"Never?"

"Never."

"Not even at her window?"

"Not even her shadow, I tell you."

"That must stop. Come, has she a lover?"

"I have never seen a man enter her house, except this Rémy of whom I told you."

"What sort of a house is it?"

"Two stories, a small door on a step, a terrace above the second window."

"But could one not enter from this terrace?"

"It is separated from the other houses."

"And opposite, what is there?"

"Another house very similar, although more elevated, it seems to me."

"By whom is this house inhabited?"

"By a sort of bourgeois."

"Of a bad or a good disposition?"

"Of a good disposition, for sometimes I hear him laughing all alone."

"Buy his house from him."

"Who told you that it was for sale?"

"Offer him double its value."

"And if the lady sees me there" —

"Well?"

"— she will disappear again, while by concealing my presence I hope some day or other to see her once more."

"You shall see her this evening."

"I?"

"Take your stand beneath her balcony at eight o'clock."

"I shall be there, as I am every day, but without more hope than on other days."

"By the way! The right address?"

"Between the Porte Bussy and the Hôtel Saint-Denis, almost at the corner of the Rue des Augustins, twenty steps from a large inn, bearing the sign, *The Sword of the Proud Chevalier.*"

"Very well; at eight this evening."

"But what will you do?"

"You will see, you will hear. Meanwhile, return home, don your most beautiful clothes, put on your richest jewels, perfume your hair with your finest essences; this evening you shall enter the house."

"May God hear you, brother!"

"Henry, when God is deaf, the devil is not. I leave you, my mistress awaits me; no, I mean the mistress of Monsieur de Mayenne. By the pope! *she* is not prudish."

"Brother!"

"Pardon, beautiful servant of love; I will make no other comparison between these two ladies, you may be sure, although after what you tell me I love better mine, or rather ours. But she is expecting me, and I do not wish to keep her waiting. Adieu, Henry, until this evening."

"Until this evening, Anne."

The two brothers grasped hands and separated.

The one, at the end of two hundred steps, boldly raised and noisily let fall the knocker of a beautiful gothic house situated in the square of Nôtre Dame.

The other plunged silently into one of the tortuous streets which lead to the Palais.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH THE SWORD OF THE PROUD CHEVALIER WINS OVER THE ROSE-TREE OF LOVE.

During the conversation which we have just reported, night had fallen, enveloping in its damp cloak of fog the city, which, two hours previous, had been so noisy.

Salcède dead, the spectators had thought of returning to their homes, and one saw only some scattered groups, instead of that uninterrupted chain of people who during the day had rushed together to one common point.

Even in the most distant quarters of the Grève there were some remains of the earthquake, which may easily be understood, after the prolonged agitation of the centre.

Thus in the quarter of the Porte Bussy, for instance, whither we must transport ourselves at this hour, in order to follow some of the personages whom we put on the stage in the beginning of our story, and in order to make the acquaintance of some new ones, — in this quarter, we say, there was heard a buzzing like a swarm of bees at sunset, in a certain rose-colored house, decorated with blue and white paintings, which was called *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier*, but which was only an inn of gigantic proportions recently built in the new quarter. At this time Paris could not boast of a single good inn which did not have its triumphant sign. *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier* was one of these magnificent exhibitions, destined to satisfy all tastes and to answer all sympathies.

There was painted on the entablature the combat between an archangel or a saint and a dragon, darting forth, like the monster of Hippolytus, torrents of flame and smoke. The painter, animated by a sentiment at once heroic and pious, had placed in the hands of the proud chevalier, armed *cap-a-pie*, not a sword, but an immense cross, with which he was cutting in two more cleverly than with the sharpest blade the unfortunate dragon, whose fragments lay bleeding on the ground.

There were to be seen at the bottom of the sign, or rather of the picture, for the sign was certainly deserving of this name, — there were to be seen quantities of spectators raising their

arms to Heaven, while in the sky, angels were dropping laurels and palms upon the helmet of the proud chevalier.

Finally, in the first design, the artist, anxious to prove that he could paint everything, had grouped together pumpkins, grapes, beetles, lizards, a snail on a rose; and lastly, two rabbits, one white, the other gray, which in spite of the difference in color, that might have indicated a difference of opinion, were scratching each other's nose, in probable delight at the memorable victory obtained by the proud chevalier over the symbolic dragon who was no other than Satan. Assuredly, unless the proprietor of the sign were difficult to please, he would have been satisfied with the conscience of the painter. In fact, the artist had not lost a line of space, and if it had been necessary to add a worm to the picture, room would have been lacking. Now let us confess one thing, and this avowal, although painful, is forced upon our conscience as story-teller, it did not follow from this fine sign that the inn was filled as it was in its prosperous days; on the contrary, for reasons which we shall presently explain, and which we hope the public will understand, there were, we will not say even occasionally but almost always, great empty rooms at the inn of *The Proud Chevalier*.

Yet, as they would say in our day, the house was roomy and comfortable; square in shape, and affixed to the ground by a firm foundation. Above its sign it spread out in a superb way four towers, each containing its octagon chamber; the whole built, it is true, from large boards, but coquettish and mysterious looking as should be the case with every house that wishes to please men, and especially women; but therein lay the evil; we cannot please every one. Such, however, was not the conviction of Dame Fournichon, hostess of *The Proud Chevalier*. In consequence of this conviction, she had prevailed upon her husband to give up a bathing-house in which they were vegetating in the Rue Saint-Honoré, in order to turn the spit and tap the wine for the benefit of the lovers of the Bussy cross-roads, and even from other quarters of Paris. Unfortunately for the hopes of Dame Fournichon, her inn was situated somewhat near to the Pré-aux-Clercs, so that, attracted both by the neighborhood and the sign, *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier*, there came so many couples ready to fight that others less belligerent fled from the poor inn as from a plague, in the fear of noise and unexpected attacks. Lovers are a peaceful

people who do not like to be disturbed, so that in these gallant little towers it was necessary to lodge only weather-beaten soldiers, and all the cupids represented on the panels of wood by the painter of the sign had been decorated with mustaches and other appendages, more or less proper, by the charcoal of the regular patrons.

Therefore Dame Fournichon claimed, and, until then, not without reason, it must be admitted, that the sign had brought ill luck to the house, and she affirmed that if they had been willing to yield to her experience, and to paint above the door, instead of the proud cavalier and the hideous dragon, which repelled every one, something gallant, as, for instance, the *Rose-tree of Love*, with hearts inflamed instead of roses, all the tender souls would have chosen her inn as their abode.

Unfortunately, Maître Fournichon, incapable of acknowledging that he repented of his idea, and the effect that the idea had had on his sign, took no account of the suggestions of his housekeeper, and answered, shrugging his shoulders, that he, the old standard-bearer of Monsieur Danville, ought naturally to look for patronage among the soldiers; he added that a reiter,[1] who thought of nothing but drinking, consumes as much as six lovers, and that should he pay only the half of the bill, they would still make money, since the most prodigal lovers never pay as well as three reiters.

Moreover, he concluded, wine is more moral than love.

At these words Dame Fournichon, in turn, would shrug her plump shoulders in such a way as to cause an evil interpretation to be put on her ideas in the matter of morals. Things were at this divided state in the Fournichon household, and the couple were vegetating in the Rue Bussy, as they had vegetated in the Rue Saint Honoré, when an unforeseen circumstance occurred to change the face of things, and to cause the ideas of Maître Fournichon to triumph, to the greatest glory of that worthy sign, in which every kingdom of nature had its representative.

One month before the execution of Salcède, at the close of some military exercises which had taken place in the Pré-aux-Clercs, Dame Fournichon and her husband were each sitting, according to habit, in an angular tower of their establishment, idle, dreary, and indifferent, because all the tables and all the rooms of the inn of *The Proud Chevalier* were completely empty.

[1] German horse-soldier of the fourteenth and fifteenth century. — *Tr.*

On that day the *Rose-tree of Love* had given no roses.

On that day *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier* had not been drawn.

The couple, therefore, were gazing sadly at the plain, whence the soldiers whom the captain had just been drilling were disappearing, to embark in the ferry-boat from the Tour de Nesle, and return to the Louvre; and as they watched them and groaned over the military despotism, which forced the body-guard of soldiers, who must naturally have been so thirsty, to return, they saw the captain put his horse to the trot, and advance, with a single orderly, in the direction of the Porte Bussy.

In ten minutes this plumed officer, seated proudly on his white steed, and whose sword in its gilt scabbard raised a beautiful cloak of cloth of Flanders, was in front of the inn.

But as it was not to the inn that he was bound, he was about to pass by without even having admired the sign, for he seemed care-worn and preoccupied, when Maître Fournichon, whose heart failed him at the thought of not entertaining any one that day, leaned out of his tower, and cried:

"Look, wife, what a fine horse!" To which Madame Fournichon replied affably, in true inn style:

"And what a handsome cavalier, too!"

The captain, who did not seem insensible to flattery, no matter whence it came, raised his head as though he had suddenly awakened. He saw the host, the hostess, and the inn, reined in his horse, and called his orderly.

Then, still in the saddle, he looked attentively at the house and the quarter.

Fournichon had run down the stairs four steps at a time, and was standing at the door twisting his cap between his two hands.

The captain, having reflected a few minutes, dismounted.

"Is there no one here?" said he.

"Not just now, monsieur," replied the host, humiliated.

And he hastened to add:

"However, such is not the habit of the house."

But Dame Fournichon, like almost all women, was more clear-sighted than her husband; consequently she hastened to cry aloud from the window:

"If monsieur seeks solitude, he will be perfectly comfortable with us."

The cavalier raised his head, and seeing the kind face, after hearing the kind words, replied:

"For the present, yes; that is exactly what I am looking for, my good woman."

Dame Fournichon at once hastened to meet the traveller, and said:

"This time it is the *Rose-tree of Love* that entertains and not *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier.*"

The captain who, at that time, was attracting the attention of the couple, and who at the same time deserves to attract that of the reader, was a man thirty or thirty-five years of age, but who seemed twenty-eight, such care had he taken of his person. He was tall, well formed, with expressive and refined features; perhaps on close examination one might have discovered some affectation in his lordly manner; but affected or not, his manner was courtly. He threw into the hands of his companion the bridle of the magnificent horse which was stamping the ground, and said to him:

"Wait for me here, while you walk the horses about."

The soldier took the bridle and obeyed.

Once within the large room of the inn, the cavalier paused, and throwing a glance of satisfaction about him:

"Oh! oh!" he exclaimed, "such an immense room, and not a drinker! Good!"

Maître Fournichon regarded him in astonishment, while Madame Fournichon smiled upon him intelligently.

"But," continued the captain, "there is, then, something in your conduct, or in your house, which keeps drinkers away from you?"

"Neither the one nor the other, monsieur, thank God!" replied Madame Fournichon; "but the quarter is new, and as to customers, we choose."

"Ah! very good," said the captain.

"For instance," she continued, with a certain wink of the eye, which revealed the author of the project of the *Rose-tree of Love*, "for instance, for one customer like your lordship we would willingly give up a dozen."

"That is polite, my pretty hostess. Thanks."

"Does monsieur wish to taste some wine?" said Fournichon, in his least rasping tone.

"Does monsieur wish to see the rooms?" said Madame Fournichon, in her sweetest voice.

"Both, if you please," replied the captain.

Fournichon descended into the cellar, while his wife pointed out to her guest the stairway leading to the towers, upon which, having tucked up her coquettish skirt, she already had preceded him, at every step making her real Parisian slippers creak.

"How many persons can you lodge here?" asked the captain, when he had reached the first floor.

"Thirty, of whom ten can be men."

"That is not enough, pretty hostess," replied the captain.

"Why not, monsieur?"

"I had a project; let us say no more about it."

"Ah! monsieur, you will certainly not find a better inn than the *Rose-tree of Love.*"

"What! the *Rose-tree of Love?*"

"*The Proud Chevalier*, I mean, and unless having the Louvre and its dependencies" —

The stranger gave her a singular glance.

"You are right," said he; "and unless the Louvre" —

Then, aside:

"Why not?" he continued; "it would be more convenient, and less expensive. You say, then, my good dame," he resumed aloud, "that you could accommodate thirty persons here?"

"Yes, without doubt."

"But for a day?"

"Oh! for one day, forty or even forty-five."

"Forty-five! *parfandious!* that is just my number."

"Indeed! see how fortunate it is, then."

"And without its causing gossip outside?"

"Sometimes on Sundays we have eighty soldiers here."

"And no crowd in front of the house? No spy among the neighbors?"

"Oh, my God, no! We have for neighbors only a worthy bourgeois, who meddles with nobody's affairs, and a lady who lives such a retired life that for the three weeks she has lived in the quarter I have not seen her once; all the others are working people."

"That suits me wonderfully well."

"So much the better," said Madame Fournichon.

"And one month from to-day," continued the captain, "remember that, madame, — one month from to-day."

"The twenty-sixth of October, then?"

"Exactly; the twenty-sixth of October."

"Well?"

"Well, the twenty-sixth of October I will hire your inn."

"The whole of it?"

"The whole of it. I want to give a surprise to some countrymen, officers, or at least soldiers, for the most part, who are coming to Paris to seek their fortune; between now and then they will have received word to come to you."

"And how will they have received this word if it is a surprise you are giving them?" imprudently demanded Madame Fournichon.

"Ah!" replied the captain, visibly embarrassed by the question; "ah! if you are inquisitive or indiscreet, *parfandious!*"

"No, no, monsieur," Madame Fournichon hastened to say, becoming frightened. Fournichon had overheard; at the words "officers or soldiers" his heart had leaped with joy. He ran in.

"Monsieur," said he, "you shall be master here, the despot of the house, and without a question from us, my God! All your friends shall be welcome."

"I did not say friends, my good fellow," said the captain, haughtily. "I said my countrymen."

"Yes, yes, the countrymen of his lordship; it is I who made the mistake."

Dame Fournichon turned her back in ill humor; the roses of love had changed into bushes of halberds.

"You will give them supper," went on the captain.

"Very well."

"You will even let them rest, if necessary, if I have not been able to secure lodgings for them."

"Gladly."

"In a word, you will put yourselves at their entire disposal, without questioning them in the least."

"That is understood."

"Here are thirty pounds as earnest money."

"The bargain is concluded, my lord. Your countrymen shall be treated like kings, and if you wish to convince yourself of this by tasting the wine" —

"I never drink, thanks."

The captain approached the window and called the orderly with the horses.

In the meantime, Maître Fournichon had reflected.

"My lord," said he (since the receipt of the three pistoles so generously paid in advance, Maître Fournichon addressed the stranger as "my lord"), "my lord, how am I to recognize these gentlemen?"

"That is so, *parfandious!* I forgot; give me some wax, a piece of paper, and a light."

Dame Fournichon brought them. The captain pressed on the flaming wax the bezel of a ring which he wore on his left hand.

"There," said he, "you see this figure?"

"A beautiful woman, in faith."

"Yes, it is a Cleopatra; well, each one of my countrymen will bring you a similar stamp; you will therefore lodge the bearer of this stamp. That is understood, is it not?"

"For how long?"

"I do not know yet; you will receive my orders on the subject."

"We shall await them."

The handsome cavalier descended the staircase, sprang into his saddle, and departed at a trot.

While awaiting his return the Fournichons pocketed their thirty pounds of earnest money, to the great joy of the host, who did not cease to reiterate:

"Soldiers! well, decidedly the sign is not wrong, and it is by the sword that we shall make our fortune."

And he set to work to polish all his saucepans, while looking forward to the famous twenty-sixth of October.

CHAPTER VIII.

SKETCH OF THE GASCON.

To say that Dame Fournichon was as absolutely discreet as the stranger had recommended her to be, we should not venture. Moreover, no doubt she thought herself exempt from all obligation to him, by the gift which he had given Maître Fournichon at the inn of *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier*, but as there still remained more for her to guess than she had been told, in order to establish her suppositions on a solid

basis she began by trying to discover who was the unknown cavalier who had paid so generously for the hospitality of his fellow-countrymen.

Therefore she did not fail to question the first soldier whom she saw pass, as to the name of the captain who had commanded the review.

The soldier, who probably was more discreet than his interlocutor, demanded first, before replying, for what reason she asked the question.

"Because he has just left here," replied Madame Fournichon, "because he talked with us, and because one wishes to know to whom one speaks."

The soldier began to laugh.

"The captain who commanded the review would not have entered *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier*, Madame Fournichon," said he.

"Why not?" asked the hostess; "is he then too great a lord for that?"

"Possibly."

"Well, if I told you that it was not for himself that he entered the inn of *The Proud Chevalier*"—

"And for whom, then?"

"For his friends."

"And the captain who commanded the review would not lodge his friends at *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier*, I am positive."

"Plague it! How you go on, my good man! And who, pray, is this gentleman who is too great a lord to lodge his friends in the best inn of Paris?"

"You are speaking of the commander of the review, are you not?"

"Without doubt."

"Well, my good woman, the commander of the review is purely and simply Monsieur le Duc Nogaret de la Valette d'Épernon, peer of France, colonel-general of the Infantry of the King, and somewhat more of a king than his Majesty himself. So what do you say to that?"

"That if it is he who came, he did me honor."

"Did you hear him say '*parfandious*'?"

"Well! well!" said Dame Fournichon, who had seen many extraordinary things in her life, and to whom the word "*parfandious*" was not wholly unknown.

Now one can judge if the twenty-sixth of October was awaited with impatience.

On the evening of the twenty-fifth a man entered, carrying a rather heavy bag, which he laid on the buffet of the Fournichons.

"This is the price of the supper ordered for to-morrow," said he.

"At how much a head?" asked both Fournichons at once.

"Six pounds."

"Will the countrymen of the captain have only one meal here?"

"Only one."

"The captain has found rooms for them, then?"

"Apparently."

And the messenger went out in spite of the questions of the *Rose-tree* and the *Sword*, not wishing to reply further to any of them.

At length the longed-for day dawned on the kitchens of *The Proud Chevalier*.

Half-past twelve had just struck from the Augustins, when some horsemen drew up before the door of the inn, dismounted, and went in.

They had come by the Porte Bussy, and naturally were the earliest arrivals, in the first place because they had horses, then because the inn of the *Sword* was scarcely a hundred feet from the Porte Bussy.

One of them, indeed, who seemed their leader, as much by his fine bearing as by his elegant surroundings, had come with two well-mounted lackeys.

Each of them showed his seal with the image of Cleopatra, and was received by the Fournichons with all sorts of attentions, especially the young man with the two lackeys.

However, with the exception of the latter, the newcomers installed themselves but timidly, and with a certain anxiety; one could see that something serious was occupying their minds, especially when they mechanically carried their hands to their pockets.

Some asked to rest themselves, others to stroll about the city before supper; the young man with the two lackeys asked if there was nothing new to see in Paris.

"Faith!" said Dame Fournichon, impressed by the fine appearance of the cavalier, "if you are not afraid of the crowd,

and if you do not mind being on your legs for four hours at a time, you can amuse yourself by going to see Monsieur de Salcède, a Spaniard, who has conspired."

"Why," said the young man, "that is true; I have heard of the affair; I will go there, *pardioux!*" And he left with his two lackeys. About two o'clock there arrived, in groups of four or five, a dozen or so new travellers.

Some of them came alone. There was one, even, who entered like a neighbor, without a hat, a switch in his hand; he swore against Paris, where the robbers were so bold that his hat had been stolen from him so skilfully, as he passed by a group near the Grève, that he had been unable to see who had taken it.

For the rest, it was his own fault. He should not have entered Paris with a hat ornamented with such a magnificent clasp.

Toward four o'clock there were already forty compatriots of the captain installed in the inn of the Fournichons.

"Is it not strange," said the host to his wife, "they are all Gascons?"

"Do you think that strange?" replied the dame; "did not the captain say that they were his countrymen whom he was to receive?"

"Well?"

"Since he is a Gascon himself, his countrymen must be Gascons."

"Yes, that is true," said the host.

"Is not Monsieur d'Épernon from Toulouse?"

"True! True! You still have the idea, then, that it is Monsieur d'Épernon?"

"Did he not let out three times the famous *parfandious?*"

"He has let out the famous *parfandious?*" said Fournichon, perplexed. "What sort of an animal is that?"

"Imbecile! It is his favorite oath."

"Ah! That is so."

"You may be surprised at only one thing; that is, at having but forty Gascons when you should have forty-five."

But about five o'clock the five other Gascons arrived, and the number of guests at the *Sword* was complete. Never did such surprise light up Gascon faces. For an hour there were *sandioux; mordioux; cap de Bious;* in fact, outbursts of joy so noisy that it seemed to the Fournichons as

though all Saintonge, all Poitou, all Aunis, and all Languedoc had burst into their great room. Some were acquainted with one another; hence Eustache de Miradoux came forward to embrace the cavalier with the two lackeys, and presented Lardille, Militor, and Scipio to him.

"By what chance are you in Paris?" said he.

"But, you, my dear Saint Maline."

"I have a post in the army, and you?"

"I come on a matter of inheritance."

"Ah! ah! And you always drag old Lardille after you?"

"She would follow me."

"Could you not leave secretly, instead of embarrassing yourself with all this crowd that clings to her skirts?"

"Impossible, it was she who opened the letter from the procurator."

"Ah! you received news of this inheritance by letter?" demanded Saint Maline.

"Yes," replied Miradoux. Then hastening to change the subject:

"Is it not singular," said he, "that this inn is full, and full of countrymen only?"

"No, it is not singular; the sign is tempting to men of honor," interrupted our old friend Perducas de Pincornay, mingling in the conversation.

"Ah! ah! Is it you, my friend?" said Saint Maline; "you have not explained to me what you were telling me near the Place de Grève when this great crowd separated us."

"What was I going to explain to you?" demanded Pincornay, growing somewhat red.

"Why, between Angoulême and Angers, I met you on the road, as I see you to-day, on foot, without a hat, a switch in your hand."

"Does your mind dwell on this, monsieur?"

"Faith! yes!" said Saint Maline, "it is far from Poitiers here, and you come from beyond Poitiers."

"I come from Saint André de Cubsac."

"Ah! and like this, without a hat?"

"That is easily explained."

"I do not think so."

"Well, you will. My father has two magnificent horses, to which he is so greatly attached that he is likely to disinherit me, since the accident that happened to me."

"What accident happened to you?"

"I was riding one of the horses, the finer of the two, when all at once a gun went off not ten feet from me; my horse became frightened at the sound, started off, and took the road to the Dordogne."

"Where he fell in?"

"Exactly."

"With you?"

"No; luckily, I had time to slip off, otherwise I should have been drowned with him."

"Ah! ah! so the poor beast was drowned?"

"By Heavens! You know the Dordogne, a half a mile wide."

"And then?"

"Then I decided not to return home, but to get away as far as possible from my father's anger."

"But your hat?"

"Now wait; the devil! my hat fell off."

"Like you?"

"I did not fall off; I let myself slip down. A Pincornay does not fall off his horse; the Pincornays are riders in their swaddling-clothes."

"That is well known," said Saint Maline; "but your hat?"

"Ah! yes; my hat?"

"Yes."

"My hat fell off. I set out to find it, for it was my only resource, having started without money."

"But how could your hat be a resource to you?" insisted Saint Maline, determined to drive Pincornay to the wall.

"By Heavens! it was a great one! I must tell you that the plume of this hat was held in place by a diamond clasp, which his Majesty the Emperor Charles V. gave to my grandfather, when on his return from Spain to Flanders he stopped at our château."

"Ah! Ah! And you have sold the clasp and the hat with it? Then, my dear friend, you ought to be the richest of all of us, and with the money from your clasp you ought to have bought a second glove. You have dissimilar hands: one is white, like the hand of a woman, the other is as black as that of a negro."

"Wait a bit; just as I was turning back to look for my hat I saw an enormous raven swoop down from above."

"On your hat?"

"On my diamond rather; you know this bird steals everything that shines, so he swooped down on my diamond and stole it."

"Your diamond?"

"Yes, monsieur. At first, I followed him with my eyes; then I started to run, shouting out 'Stop! stop! thief!' Plague on it! at the end of five minutes he had disappeared, and I have never heard a word of him since."

"So that overwhelmed by this double loss" —

"I did not dare to return to my father's home, and I decided to come to Paris to seek my fortune."

"Good!" said a third, "the wind, then, is changed into a raven? It seems to me I heard you telling Monsieur de Loignac, that, while you were occupied in reading a letter from your mistress, the wind carried off letter and hat, and that like a true Amadis, you ran after the letter, letting the hat go whither it would?"

"Monsieur," said Saint Maline, "I have the honor of being acquainted with Monsieur d'Aubigné, who, although a very brave soldier, handles the pen also; tell him, when you meet him, the history of your hat, and he will make a charming story of it."

Some half-stifled laughter was heard.

"Well! well! gentlemen," said the irritable Gascon, "are you making fun of me?"

Each one turned round in order to laugh more at his ease. Perducas threw a questioning glance about him, and saw near the chimney a young man who was hiding his head in his hands; he thought that he was doing this only to conceal himself the better.

He went to him.

"Well! monsieur," said he, "if you laugh, at least laugh openly, that one may see your face."

And he touched the shoulder of the young man, who raised a grave and serious brow. The latter was none other than our friend Ernauton de Carmainges, still completely mystified by his adventure on the Grève.

"I beg you to leave me alone, monsieur," said he, "and especially, if you touch me again, to use the hand on which you wear your glove; you see very well that I am not concerned with you."

"Very good!" growled Pincornay, "if you are not concerned with me, I have nothing to say."

"Ah! monsieur," said Eustache de Miradoux to Carmainges, with the kindest intentions, "you are not gracious to our countryman."

"And why the devil do you interfere, monsieur?" said Ernauton, more and more vexed.

"You are right, monsieur," said Miradoux, bowing, "it does not concern me."

He turned on his heels to rejoin Lardille, who was seated in a corner of the wide chimney; but some one barred his passage. It was Militor, with both hands in his belt, and his sly smile on his lips.

"Come, tell us, step-father," said the good-for-nothing fellow.

"Well?"

"What do you say about it?"

"About what?"

"About the manner in which this gentleman clinched the argument?"

"What?"

"He shook you in fine style."

"Ah! you noticed that, did you?" said Eustache, trying to turn Militor aside.

But the latter frustrated the intention by stepping to the left, and again facing him:

"Not I alone," continued Militor, "all of us noticed it; see how every one around us is laughing."

The fact is they were laughing, but not more at that than at anything else.

Eustache became as red as a glowing coal.

"Come! come, step-father, don't let the affair cool off," said Militor.

The pride of Eustache was touched, and approaching De Carmainges:

"They say, monsieur," said he, "that you wished to be especially disagreeable to me."

"When was that?"

"Just now."

"To you?"

"To me."

"And who says that?"

"Monsieur," said Eustache, indicating Militor.

"Then *monsieur*," replied Carmainges, lingering ironically on the word, "then *monsieur* is a starling."

"Oh! oh!" cried Militor, furious.

"And I advise him," continued Carmainges, "not to come thrusting his bill at me, or I shall recall the words of Monsieur de Loignac."

"Monsieur de Loignac did not say that I was a starling, monsieur."

"No; he said that you were an ass; do you prefer that? It makes little difference to me: if you are an ass, I will beat you; if you are a starling, I will pull out your feathers."

"Monsieur," said Eustache, "this is my step-son; treat him better, I beg you, out of regard for me."

"Ah! how you protect me, step-father!" cried Militor, exasperated; "if it is in this way, I can defend myself better alone."

"To school with the children!" said Ernauton, "to school!"

"To school!" cried Militor, advancing, his fist raised, toward Monsieur de Carmainges. "I am seventeen years old; do you hear me, monsieur?"

"And I — I am twenty-five," said Ernauton; "that is why I am going to chastise you as you deserve."

And seizing him by the collar and the belt, he raised him from the floor, and hurled him, as he would have done a package, through the window of the ground floor into the street, while Lardille screamed loud enough to make the walls crumble.

"Now," said Ernauton calmly, "step-father, step-mother, step-son, and every family on earth, I will make mince-meat of any one who bothers me again."

"Faith!" said Miradoux, "I think he is right, too. Why irritate the gentleman?"

"Ah! coward, coward; to let his son be beaten!" cried Lardille, advancing toward Eustache and pulling his few hairs.

"There, there, there," said Eustache; "peace; it is good for his disposition."

"Ah! tell me, do they throw men out of the window here?" said an officer, entering; "the devil! when one carries out this sort of a joke, one should at least shout: 'Look out, below there!'"

"Monsieur de Loignac!" cried twenty voices.

"Monsieur de Loignac!" repeated the Forty-Five.

And at this name known throughout Gascony, each one rose and stood silent.

CHAPTER IX.

MONSIEUR DE LOIGNAC.

Behind Monsieur de Loignac, Militor entered, bruised by his fall and crimson with anger.

"Your servant, gentlemen," said De Loignac; "we are making a great noise, it seems to me. . . . Ah! ah! Maître Militor has been ugly again, apparently, and his nose is suffering for it."

"I will pay you back," growled Militor, shaking his fist at Carmainges.

"Supper, Maître Fournichon," cried De Loignac, "and let every one be friends with his neighbor, if possible. From now on let us love one another like brothers."

"Humph!" said Saint Maline.

"Charity is rare," said Chalabre, spreading his napkin over his iron-gray doublet, so that whatever the quantity of the sauces, no accident might happen.

"And to love one another at such close range is difficult," added Ernauton; "it is true that we are not together for very long."

"See," cried Pincornay, who still had the raillery of Saint Maline at heart, "they make fun of me because I have no hat, and they say nothing to Monsieur de Montcrabeau, who is going to dine in a cuirass of the time of the Emperor Pertinax, from whom, in all probability, he is descended. That is what being on the defensive is."

Montcrabeau, growing warm, arose, and in a strained voice:

"Gentlemen," said he, "I will take it off; a suggestion to those who love better to see me with arms offensive, than with arms defensive."

And he majestically unlaced his cuirass, making a sign to his lackey, a great gray-haired fellow of fifty, to approach.

"Come, peace! peace!" said Monsieur de Loignac, "and let us take our places at table."

"Help me off with this cuirass, I beg you," said Pertinax to his lackey.

The big fellow took it in his hands.

"And I," said he, in a low tone, "am I not going to dine also? Hand me something, Pertinax; I am dying of hunger."

This remark, strangely familiar as it was, excited no surprise in him to whom it was addressed.

"I will do all I can," said he; "but to make sure, ask for yourself."

"Humph!" said the lackey in a sullen tone, "that is not very encouraging."

"Have you absolutely nothing left?" demanded Pertinax.

"We ate up our last crown at Sens."

"Well! See if you cannot make some money."

Scarcely had he finished speaking when they heard a cry in the street, and then on the threshold of the inn:

"Old iron to buy! Who wants to sell his sword and his old iron?" At this cry, Madame Fournichon ran to the door, while Fournichon majestically placed the first dishes on the table.

If one may judge from the way in which they were received, the cuisine of Fournichon must have been delicious.

Fournichon, unable to face all the compliments addressed to him, wanted to admit his wife to a share of them.

He looked for her, but in vain; she had disappeared. He called her.

"What can she be doing?" demanded he of a scullion, seeing that she did not come.

"Ah! maître, a golden bargain," replied the latter. "She is selling all your old iron for new silver."

"I hope she is not making way with my cuirass or my helmet!" cried Fournichon, rushing to the door.

"No, no," said De Loignac, "since the purchase of arms is forbidden by order of the King."

"Never mind," said Fournichon, and he ran to the door. Madame Fournichon returned triumphant.

"Well? What is the matter?" said she, seeing her husband thoroughly startled.

"They said you were selling my arms."

"Well?"

"Well; I do not want them sold."

"Bah! since we are at peace, two new saucepans are better than one old cuirass."

"However, buying old iron must be a pretty poor business, since the edict of the King was issued to which Monsieur de Loignac was just referring," said Chalabre.

"On the contrary, monsieur," said Dame Fournichon, "for

a long time this same merchant has been tempting me with his offers. Faith! to-day I could not resist him, and taking advantage of the opportunity, I made the most of it. Ten crowns, monsieur, are ten crowns, and an old cuirass is never anything but an old cuirass."

"What! ten crowns?" said Chalabre, "as much as that? The devil!" and he grew pensive.

"Ten crowns!" repeated Pertinax, casting an eloquent glance at his lackey; "do you hear, Monsieur Samuel?"

But Monsieur Samuel was no longer there.

"Ah!" said Monsieur de Loignac, "that merchant runs the risk of hanging, it seems to me."

"Oh! he is a brave man, very gentle and very accommodating," replied Madame Fournichon.

"But what does he do with all this iron?"

"He sells it again by weight."

"By weight?" said De Loignac; "and you say that he gave you ten crowns? For what?"

"For an old cuirass and an old sallet."[1]

"Supposing that together they weigh twenty pounds, that is half a crown a pound. *Parfandious!* as some one of my acquaintance says, herein lies a mystery!"

"If I could but catch this honest merchant in my château," said Chalabre, with shining eyes, "I would sell him three millions in weight of helmets, armlets, and cuirasses."

"What! you would sell the arms of your ancestors?" said Saint Maline, in an ironical tone.

"Ah! monsieur," said Eustache de Miradoux, "you would be doing wrong; those are sacred relics."

"Bah!" said Chalabre, "at the present time my ancestors are relics themselves, and need only masses."

The meal was growing animated, thanks to the Burgundy wine, the consumption of which was increased by Fournichon's spices. Voices rose to a higher pitch, dishes rattled, and brains were beginning to be filled with vapors, through which each Gascon saw everything rose-colored, — except Militor, who was thinking of his fall, and Carmainges, who was thinking of his page.

"Here are a lot of happy people," said De Loignac to his neighbor, who was Ernauton, "and they do not know why."

"Nor I either," replied Carmainges. "It is true that, as

[1] Kind of helmet. — *Tr.*

far as I am concerned, I am an exception and I am not in the least joyous."

"As far as you are concerned, you are wrong, monsieur," replied De Loignac; "for you are one of those for whom Paris is a gold mine, a paradise of honors, a world of happiness."

Ernauton shook his head.

"Well, we shall see!"

"Do not laugh at me, Monsieur de Loignac," said Ernauton, "you who appear to hold all the threads which make the most of us move, but at least do me the favor of not treating the Vicomte Ernauton of Carmainges like a puppet."

"I will do you still other favors in addition to that, Monsieur le Vicomte," said De Loignac, bowing politely; "I realized at first glance the difference between you and that other young man yonder; your eye is proud and gentle, while his glance is suspicious and sombre. What is his name?"

"Monsieur de Saint Maline. But the cause of this distinction, monsieur, if the question is not too inquisitive on my part?"

"I know you; that is all."

"Me," said Ernauton, surprised, "me? you know me?"

"You and him, and all the others who are here."

"That is strange."

"Yes; but it is necessary."

"Why is it necessary?"

"Because a leader must know his soldiers."

"And all these men" —

"Will be my soldiers to-morrow."

"But I thought that Monsieur d'Épernon" —

"Hush! Do not mention that name here, or rather mention no name at all here; open your ears and close your mouth, and since I have promised to do you every favor, take this advice in part payment."

"Thank you, monsieur," said Ernauton.

De Loignac wiped his mustache and rose.

"Gentlemen," said he, "since chance brings forty-five countrymen together here, let us drain a glass of this Spanish wine to the prosperity of each."

The suggestion caused unbounded applause.

"The most of them are drunk," said De Loignac to Ernauton; "it would be a good time to make each one relate his history, but time fails us."

Then raising his voice:

"Hello! Maître Fournichon," said he, "send all the women, children, and lackeys out of here."

Lardille rose, muttering; she had not finished her dessert.

Militor did not stir.

"Did you hear me, down there?" said De Loignac, with a glance which admitted of no reply. "Come, come! — into the kitchen, Monsieur Militor."

At the end of a few minutes there remained in the room only the forty-five guests and Monsieur de Loignac.

"Gentlemen," said the latter, "each one of you knows or at least surmises who has brought him to Paris. Well! well! do not shout out his name; you know it, that suffices. You know also that you have come in order to obey him."

A murmur of assent rose from all parts of the room; but, as each knew only the business which concerned himself, and was ignorant of the fact that his neighbor had come moved by the same power as himself, all looked at each other in astonishment.

"That is well," said De Loignac; "you will look at one another later, gentlemen. Rest assured you will have time to become acquainted. You have come, therefore. to obey this man. Do you acknowledge that?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the Forty-Five, "we acknowledge it."

"Well, to begin with," continued De Loignac, "you are to leave this inn without noise, and take possession of the lodgings which have been assigned to you."

"All of us?" demanded Saint Maline.

"All of you."

"We are all commanded, we are all equal here," continued Perducas, whose legs were so uncertain that, in order to maintain his centre of gravity, it was necessary to put his arm around Chalabre's neck.

"Take care there," said the latter, "you are touching my doublet."

"Yes, all equal," replied De Loignac, "bowing to the will of the master."

"Oh! oh, monsieur!" said Carmainges, growing red, "pardon, but I had not been told that Monsieur d'Épernon would call himself my master."

"Wait!"

"I did not understand it so."

"But wait a moment, stupid!"

There fell on most of the number the silence of curiosity, and on a few the silence of impatience.

"I have not yet told you who is to be your master, gentlemen."

"No," said Saint Maline, "but you said that we were to have one."

"Every one has a master!" cried De Loignac, "but if you are too proud to bow to the one we have just mentioned, look higher; not only do I not forbid you, but I command you."

"The King," murmured Carmainges.

"Silence!" said De Loignac, "you have come to obey; obey, then. In the meantime, here is an order which you will do me the kindness to read aloud, Monsieur Ernauton."

Ernauton slowly unfolded the parchment which Monsieur de Loignac held out to him, and read as follows:

"Order to Monsieur de Loignac to take command of the forty-five gentlemen whom I have summoned to Paris, with the consent of His Majesty.

"NOGARET DE LA VALETTE, Duc d'Epernon."

Drunk or sober, all bowed; there was no inequality except in the equilibrium when they tried to rise.

"So now that you have heard me," said Monsieur de Loignac, "it is imperative to follow me instantly. Your equipages and servants will remain here at Maître Fournichon's, who will take care of them. I will have them brought to you later; but for the present, make haste; the boats are waiting."

"The boats?" repeated all the Gascons; "we are to embark, then?"

And they exchanged looks full of interest.

"Without doubt," said De Loignac, "you are to embark. To reach the Louvre is it not necessary to cross the water?"

"To the Louvre! to the Louvre!" murmured the joyful Gascons. "*Cap de Bious!* We are going to the Louvre!"

De Loignac left the table, had the Forty-Five pass before him, counted them like sheep, and led them through the streets as far as the Tour de Nesle.

There they found three large barges, each of which took fifteen passengers on board and at once left the shore.

"What the devil are we to do at the Louvre?" thought the

boldest of the men, sobered by the cold air of the river, and for the most part very scantily covered.

"If only I had my cuirass!" murmured Pertinax de Montcrabeau.

CHAPTER X.

THE MAN OF THE CUIRASSES.

Pertinax had good cause to regret his absent cuirass, for at that very hour, through the mediation of the singular lackey whom we heard speak so familiarly to his master, he had parted with it forever.

In short, at those magic words "Ten crowns!" uttered by Madame Fournichon, the valet of Pertinax had run after the merchant.

As it was already night, and as, no doubt, the iron merchant was in haste, the latter had already gone thirty steps when Samuel started from the hotel.

Samuel was therefore obliged to call to the iron merchant.

The latter halted in fear, and threw a piercing glance at the man who was coming toward him; but seeing him laden with merchandise, he stopped.

"What do you want, my friend?" said he to him.

"By Heavens!" said the lackey, pleasantly. "What I want is to transact some business with you."

"Well! then let us do it quickly."

"You are in haste?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Kindly give me time to breathe. The devil!"

"Certainly; but breathe quickly; they are waiting for me."

It was evident that the merchant felt a certain mistrust of the lackey.

"When you have seen what I bring you," said the latter, "as you seem to me to be an amateur, you will take your time."

"What do you bring me?"

"A magnificent piece; a work of which — but you are not listening to me?"

"No, I am looking."

"Why?"

"You do not know, then, my friend," said the man of the cuirasses, "that the buying and selling of arms is forbidden by an edict of the King?"

And he cast anxious looks around. The lackey judged that it was best to appear ignorant.

"I know nothing," said he; "I have just arrived from Mont de Marsan."

"Ah! in that case it is different," said the man of the cuirasses, whom this reply seemed to reassure somewhat; "but although you have just come from Mont de Marsan," he continued, "you already know that I buy arms?"

"Yes; I know it."

"Who told you so?"

"Heavens! there was no need for any one to tell me, for you shouted it out loud enough just now."

"Where?"

"At the door of the inn of *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier*."

"You were there, then?"

"Yes."

"With whom?"

"With a crowd of friends."

"With a crowd of friends? Usually there is no one at that inn."

"Then you must have found it greatly changed?"

"Exactly. But whence came all these friends?"

"From Gascony, like myself."

"Do you belong to the King of Navarre?"

"The idea! We are Frenchmen, body and soul."

"Yes, but Huguenots?"

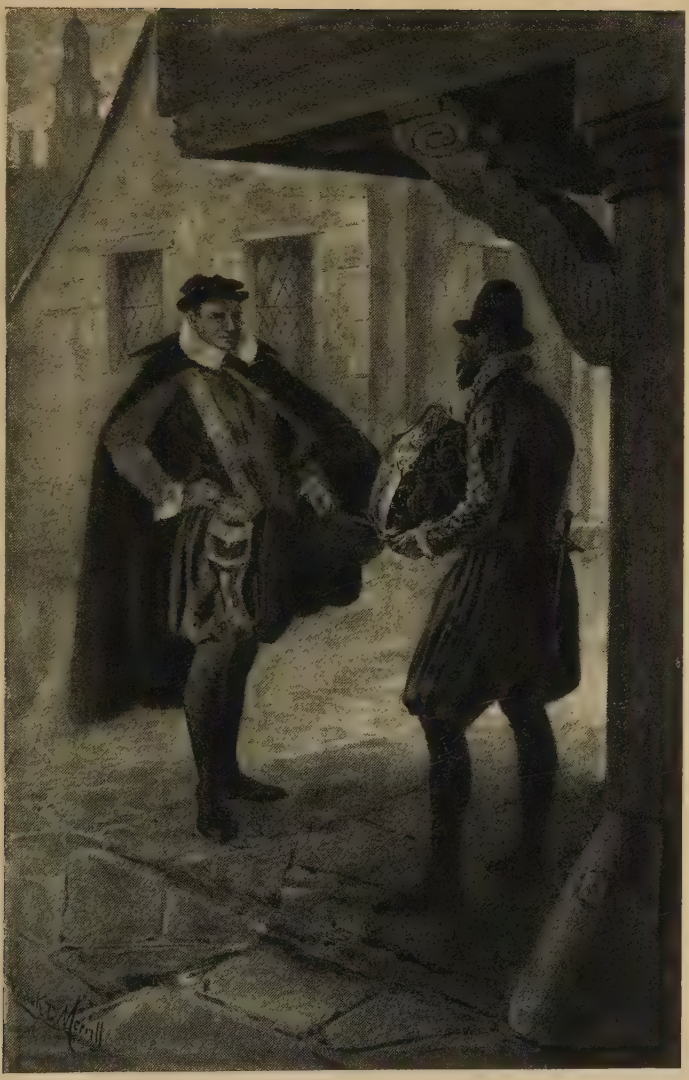
"Catholics, like our Holy Father the Pope, thank God," said Samuel, doffing his cap; "but that is not the question. How about this cuirass?"

"Let us come a little closer to the walls, if you please; we are too much exposed in the open street."

They walked on a few steps, as far as a modest-looking house, at the windows of which no light was to be seen.

The door of the house was under a sort of portico which formed a balcony. A stone bench set off the façade, of which it was the sole ornament.

This bench was at once useful and agreeable, for it served as a block to the passers-by from which to mount their mules or their horses.



"MY! HOW HEAVY IT IS!" SAID SAMUEL.

"Let us see the cuirass," said the merchant, when they had come under the portico.

"Here it is."

"Wait; they are moving, I think, in the house."

"No, it is across the street."

The merchant turned.

In fact, opposite them was a two-story house the second floor of which was lighted up now and then.

"Let us decide quickly," said the merchant, feeling of the cuirass.

"My! how heavy it is!" said Samuel.

"Old, heavy, out of date."

"A work of art."

"Six crowns, if you like."

"What! six crowns! and just now you gave ten for an old broken-down corselet!"

"Six crowns, yes or no?" repeated the merchant.

"But consider the chasing!"

"To sell again as weight, of what use is the chasing?"

"Oh! oh! you haggle over it," said Samuel, "and just now you gave all they asked."

"I will give you one crown more," said the merchant impatiently.

"The gilding alone is worth fourteen crowns."

"Come," said the merchant, "let us end this quickly, or not at all."

"Good!" said Samuel, "you are a strange merchant; you hide in order to do business; you infringe against the edicts of the King, and haggle with honest people."

"Come! come! Don't shout like that!

"Oh! I am not afraid," said Samuel raising his voice; "I am not engaged in an illicit trade, and nothing forces me to hide."

"Come then, take ten crowns, and keep still."

"Ten crowns? I tell you that the gold alone is worth that; ah! you wish to run away?"

"No. What a madman you are!"

"Well! if you run away, let me tell you, I will call the guard!"

As he uttered these words, Samuel raised his voice so that his threat was virtually carried out. At the noise, a small window opened on the balcony of the house, against

which the transaction was taking place, and it was the squeaking this window made in opening which the terrified merchant had heard.

"Come, come," said he, "I see well enough that it must be as you wish; here are fifteen crowns; now be gone with you."

"Gladly," said Samuel, pocketing the fifteen crowns.

"That is good."

"But these fifteen crowns are for my master," went on Samuel, "and there is still something due me."

The merchant glanced about him, as he half drew his dagger from its sheath. Evidently he had intended to rend Samuel's skin so that he would be saved from ever again buying a cuirass to take the place of the one he had just sold; but Samuel had an eye as sharp as a sparrow gathering crumbs, and he stepped back, saying:

"Yes, yes, good merchant, I see your dagger; but I also see something else — the figure on that balcony who is watching you."

The merchant, white with fright, looked in the direction indicated by Samuel, and saw on the balcony a tall, fantastic-looking creature, enveloped in a dressing-gown trimmed with cat fur; this argus had lost neither a syllable nor a gesture of the last scene.

"Come, come, you manage to get what you want from me," said the merchant, with a laugh like that of a hyena when it shows its teeth, "there is one more crown, and may the devil strangle you!" he added in a low tone.

"Thanks," said Samuel, "good luck to you!"

And bowing to the man of the cuirasses, he disappeared with a sneer.

The merchant, left alone in the street, began to gather up the cuirass of Pertinax and to insert it into that of Fournichon.

The bourgeois still watched him; then when he saw the merchant well laden:

"It appears, monsieur," said he to him, "that you buy armor?"

"Oh, no, monsieur," replied the unfortunate merchant, "it was merely by chance and because the opportunity offered itself."

"Well, the chance suits me wonderfully well."

"In what respect, monsieur?" demanded the merchant.

"Well! I actually have, within reach, a pile of old iron which is in my way."

"I do not doubt it; but just now, as you see, I have all that I can carry."

"I will show it to you."

"It is useless; I have no more money."

"You need not mind that, I will give you credit; you look like a perfectly honest man."

"Thanks, but my friends are waiting for me."

"It is strange, but it seems to me that I know you!" said the bourgeois.

"Me?" said the merchant, striving in vain to repress a shudder.

"Look at this helmet," said the bourgeois, pushing forward the object referred to with his long foot, for he was unwilling to leave the window, fearing lest the merchant should steal away. He placed the helmet in the hand of the merchant.

"You know me," said the latter, "that is to say, you think you know me?"

"That is to say I know you. Are you not"—

The bourgeois seemed to consider; the merchant remained motionless, waiting.

"Are you not Nicholas?"

The face of the merchant changed, the helmet trembled in his hand.

"Nicholas?" he repeated.

"Nicholas Truchov, iron merchant, Rue de la Cossonnerie."

"No, no," replied the merchant, who smiled and breathed again, like a man four times happy.

"No matter, you have a good face, and I want you to buy my complete set of armor, cuirass, armlets, and sword."

"Remember that it is forbidden commerce, monsieur."

"I know that; your man shouted it out loud enough to you just now."

"You overheard?"

"Perfectly; you were even generous in the affair; that is what gave me the idea of dealing with you; but do not fear, I shall not take advantage of you. I know what business is; I have been a merchant myself."

"Ah! and what did you sell?"

"What did I sell? Favors."

"A good business, monsieur."

"Therefore I made my fortune in it, and you find me a bourgeois."

"I congratulate you."

"As a result, I like my ease, and I want to sell all my old iron because it is in my way."

"I understand that."

"There are cuirasses there also. Ah! and then the gloves."

"But I have no need of all those."

"Nor I."

"I will take only the cuirass."

"You buy nothing but cuirasses, then?"

"No."

"That is queer, for you buy in order to sell by weight; you said so, at least, and iron is iron."

"That is true, but you see, by preference"—

"As you please; buy the cuirass, or rather, you are right; go, buy nothing at all."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that in times like these every one has need of arms."

"What! in times of peace?"

"My dear friend, if we were at peace, there would not be such buying and selling of cuirasses, *ventre de biche!* such things must not be said to me."

"Monsieur!"

"And especially in secret."

The merchant started to go.

"But, in truth, the more I look at you," said the bourgeois, "the more certain I am that I know you; so you are not Nicholas Truchov, but I know you just the same."

Silence.

"And if you buy cuirasses"—

"Well?"

"Well, I am sure that it is in order to accomplish a work acceptable to God."

"Hold your tongue!"

"You enchant me," said the bourgeois, stretching over the balcony a long arm, the hand of which took hold of the hand of the merchant.

"But who the devil are you?" demanded the latter, feeling his hand held as in a vise.

"I am Robert Briquet, surnamed the Terror of Schism, a

friend of the Union and a fierce Catholic; now I am positive I recognize you."

The merchant became white.

"You are Nicholas — Grimbelot, currier of cow hides."

"No, you are mistaken. Adieu, Maître Robert Briquet; delighted to have made your acquaintance."

And the merchant turned away from the balcony.

"What! you are going?"

"You can easily see."

"Without taking my old iron?"

"I have no money with me, I tell you."

"My valet can follow you."

"Impossible."

"Well, what is to be done?"

"Why! stay as we are."

"*Ventre de biche!* I will see that we do not. I have too great a desire to cultivate your acquaintance."

"And I to avoid yours," replied the merchant, who, this time, having made up his mind to abandon his cuirasses and lose all rather than be recognized, took to his heels and fled.

But Maître Robert Briquet was not the man to let himself be outwitted thus; he stepped over his balcony, reached the street without the need even of jumping, and in five or six strides overtook the merchant.

"Are you mad, my friend?" said he, laying his great hand on the poor fellow's shoulder. "If I were your enemy, if I wished to arrest you, I would have but to cry out, for the guard passes at this hour through the Rue des Augustins; but no, you are my friend, or the devil take me, and the proof of this is that now I positively recall your name."

This time the merchant began to laugh.

Robert Briquet placed himself opposite to him.

"Your name is Nicholas Poulain," said he; "you are lieutenant of the provostship of Paris. I was sure that there was a Nicholas to it."

"I am lost!" murmured the merchant.

"On the contrary, you are saved; *ventre de biche!* you will never do for the good cause what I have the intention of doing."

Nicholas Poulain gave a groan.

"Come, come, courage," said Robert Briquet; "reassure yourself. You have found a brother — Brother Briquet; take a cui-

rass, I will take two others; I will make you a present of my armlets, of my cuirasses, and of my gloves into the bargain; come on, and long live the Union!"

"You are going with me?"

"I will help you carry away the arms which ought to conquer the Philistines; show me the way and I will follow."

Very naturally there was an instant's suspicion in the soul of the unfortunate lieutenant of the provostship, but it vanished almost as soon as it came.

"If he wanted to undo me," he murmured to himself, "would he have acknowledged that he knew me?"

Then aloud:

"Well, since you really wish it, come with me," said he.

"To life or death!" cried Robert Briquet, pressing with one hand the hand of his ally, while he raised in the air the other with its burden of old iron.

The two set out.

After walking for twenty minutes Nicholas Poulain reached the Marais; he was dripping with perspiration, as much from the rapidity of the walk as from the warmth of their political conversation.

"What a recruit I have raised!" he murmured, stopping a short distance from the Hôtel de Guise.

"I feared that my armor was coming in this direction," thought Briquet.

"Friend," said Nicholas Poulain, turning with a tragic gesture to Briquet, who looked the picture of innocence, "before entering the lion's den, I will allow you a last minute for reflection; there is time for you to withdraw if you are not over-scrupulous of conscience."

"Bah!" said Briquet, "I have seen many another den, *et non intremuit medulla mea*," he declaimed. "Ah! pardon; you do not know Latin, perhaps?"

"But you do."

"As you see."

"Learned, bold, vigorous, rich; what a find!" said Poulain to himself; "well, let us enter."

And he led Briquet to the gigantic door of the Hôtel de Guise, which opened at the third blow of the bronze knocker.

The court was filled with guards and men, enveloped in cloaks, and walking about like phantoms.

There was not a single light in the hotel.

Eight horses, saddled and bridled, were waiting in one corner. The noise of the knocker made most of the men turn, and they formed a sort of hedge about the newcomers.

Then Nicholas Poulain, bending down to the ear of a janitor who held the door half open, gave him his name.

"And I bring a good companion," he added.

"Pass in, gentlemen," said the janitor.

"Take this to the storehouse," said Poulain, handing to a guard the three cuirasses, and the old iron of Robert Briquet.

"Good! there is a storehouse," said the latter to himself; "better and better. Plague it, what an organizer you are, Maître Provost!"

"Yes, yes, we have judgment," replied Poulain, smiling proudly; "but come and let me introduce you."

"Take care," said the bourgeois; "I am excessively timid. All that I desire is that they tolerate me; when I shall have given proofs of my capacity, I will present myself, as the Greek says, by my deeds alone."

"As you please," replied the lieutenant of the provostship; "wait for me here."

And he went forward to shake hands with most of those who were walking about.

"What are we waiting for?" asked a voice.

"The master," replied another voice.

At that moment a tall man entered the hotel; he had heard the last word exchanged between the mysterious figures.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I come in his name."

"Ah! it is Monsieur de Mayneville!" cried Poulain.

"Lo! here I am in a country of friends," said Briquet to himself, assuming a grimace which completely disfigured him.

"Gentlemen, here is our full number; let us deliberate;" said the voice which had first made itself heard.

"Ah! good!" said Briquet, "and this is my procurator, Maître Marteau."

And he changed the grimace with a facility which proved how familiar studies in physiognomy were to him.

"Let us go up, gentlemen," said Poulain.

Monsieur de Mayneville passed first; Nicholas Poulain followed; the men in cloaks came next, and after them Robert Briquet.

All ascended the steps of an outside stairway that led to a vault.

Robert Briquet followed the others, murmuring:

"But the page — where is that devil of a page?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE LEAGUE AGAIN.

As Robert Briquet, assuming the air of a conspirator, mounted the stairs behind the others, he saw that Nicholas Poulain, having spoken to several of his mysterious colleagues, was waiting at the door of the vault.

"It must be for me," said Briquet to himself.

In fact, the lieutenant of the provostship stopped his new friend at the very moment when he was about to cross the formidable threshold.

"You will bear me no ill-will," said he; "but most of our friends do not know you, and desire to have some information concerning you before admitting you to the council."

"That is all right," replied Briquet, "you know that my natural modesty had already foreseen this objection."

"I do you justice," replied Poulain, "you are a clever man."

"I will retire, then," went on Briquet, "delighted in one evening to have seen so many brave defenders of the Catholic Union."

"Do you wish me to take you back?" said Poulain.

"No, thank you, you need not trouble."

"You may meet with difficulties at the door; on the other hand, they are waiting for me."

"Have you not a password to use in going out? I shall not admit that I know you, Maître Nicholas; it would not be prudent."

"We have one."

"Well, give it to me."

"Since you have entered" —

"And since we are friends."

"So be it; you have but to say, *Parma* and *Lorraine*."

"And the porter will open the door for me?"

"Instantly."

"Very well, thank you. Go back to your business; I shall return to mine."

Nicholas Poulain left his companion and returned to his colleagues. Briquet started as though he were going down the stairs to the court, but at the first step he paused to explore the locality. The result of his observations showed him that the vault ran parallel with the outside wall, which it sheltered by a wide shed. It was evident that this vault led to a lower room, suited to the mysterious reunion to which Briquet had not had the honor of being admitted.

What confirmed him in this supposition, which soon become a certainty, was the fact that he saw a light appear at a grated window. This window, which was pierced in the wall, was protected by a kind of wooden funnel, such as is to-day used on the windows of prisons or convents, to intercept the view from the outside and to admit only air and light.

Briquet was right in thinking that the window looked into the meeting-place, and that if it could be reached the position would be favorable for observation, and that from there the eye could easily supply the other senses.

The only difficulty was to reach this observatory, and to secure a position from which to see without being seen.

Briquet looked about him.

In the court were the pages with their horses, the soldiers with their halberds, and the porter with his key; in short, all alert and far-sighted people.

Fortunately the court was very large and the night very dark. Moreover, pages and soldiers, having seen those devoted to the house disappear under the vault, concerned themselves with nothing more, and the porter, knowing the doors were securely fastened, and realizing the impossibility of any one's leaving without the password, troubled himself no further except to prepare his bed for the night and look after a fine jug of spiced wine which was getting warm before the fire.

There are in curiosity incentives as strong as in the outbreak of any passion. This desire to know is so great that it has consumed the life of more than one inquisitive person.

Briquet had been too well informed so far not to desire to complete his information. He gave a second glance around him, and, fascinated by the light which the window threw upon the bars of iron, he thought he saw in that reflec-

tion the sign of a challenge, and in those shining bars some provocation for his robust fists.

Consequently, determined to reach the funnel, he glided along the cornice, which led from the steps to the window, and followed the wall as a cat might have done, or a monkey, holding on by his hands and feet to the sculptured ornaments of the wall itself.

If the pages and the soldiers had been able to distinguish, in the darkness, this fantastic silhouette gliding along the middle of the wall without apparent support, they certainly would not have failed to cry out "magic," and more than one among the bravest of them would have felt his hair stand on end.

But Robert Briquet did not give them time to see his witchcraft. In four strides he reached the bars, grasped them, and crouched between them and the funnel, in such a way that from without he could not be seen, and from within he was almost hidden by the grating.

Briquet was not mistaken, and when finally there, was amply rewarded for his pains and audacity.

His eye embraced a great room lighted by an iron lamp with four burners, and filled with armor of every sort, among which, by looking closely, he would no doubt have been able to recognize his armlets and his gorget.

The quantity of pikes, swords, halberds, and muskets, ranged in piles or bundles, would have sufficed to arm four good regiments.

Briquet, however, paid less attention to the superb arrangement of these arms than to the assembly engaged in putting them to use, or in distributing them. His glowing eyes pierced the window coated with a thick covering of smoke and dust, to guess the faces of acquaintances beneath the visors or hoods.

"Oh! oh! there is Maître Crucé, our revolutionary friend; there is our little Brigard, the grocer at the corner of the Rue des Lombards; there is Maître Leclerc, who calls himself Bussy, and who certainly would not have dared to commit such a sacrilege during the years when the real Bussy was living. I must some day ask this old fencing-master if he knows the secret box in which a certain David of my acquaintance died at Lyons. Plague it! the bourgeoise is fully represented, but the nobility — Ah! Monsieur de Mayneville

— God forgive me ! — is shaking hands with Nicholas Poulain ; it is touching, they fraternize so. Ah ! ah ! this Monsieur de Mayneville is the orator, then ? He is posing, it seems to me, in order to make an address ; he has pleasant gestures and uses his eyes persuasively."

As a matter of fact, Monsieur de Mayneville had begun a discourse.

Robert Briquet shook his head while Monsieur de Mayneville was speaking ; not that he could hear a single word of the speech, but he interpreted his gestures and those of the assembly.

" He scarcely seems to convince his audience : Crucé makes a face at him, Lachappelle Marteau turns his back on him, and Bussy Leclerc shrugs his shoulders.

" Come, come, Monsieur de Mayneville, speak, perspire, get out of breath, be eloquent, *ventre de biche !* Oh, good ! There are some in the audience who are growing interested. Oh ! oh ! they crowd together, they shake hands, they throw their caps in the air ; the devil ! "

Briquet, as we have said, was able to see, but could not hear ; but we, who are present in spirit at the deliberations of the stormy gathering, will tell our readers what had just taken place there.

In the first place, Crucé, Marteau, and Bussy had complained to Monsieur de Mayneville of the inaction of the Duke de Guise.

Marteau, in his capacity of procurator, had addressed the meeting.

" Monsieur de Mayneville," he had said, " you come on the part of Duc Henri de Guise ? Thank you. We accept you as ambassador ; but the presence of the duke himself is indispensable to us. After the death of his glorious father, he, at the age of eighteen, made all good Frenchmen adopt the project of the Union and enrolled us all under this banner. According to our oath, we have exposed our persons and sacrificed our fortunes for the triumph of this holy cause ; and that is why, in spite of our sacrifices, nothing progresses, nothing is decided on. Take care, Monsieur de Mayneville, the Parisians will become tired ; and, Paris once tired, what will they do in France ? Monsieur le Duc would best think of this."

This exordium won the approval of all the Leaguers, and

Nicholas Poulain, especially, distinguished himself by his zeal in applauding. Monsieur de Mayneville replied in simple words :

" Gentlemen, if nothing is decided on, it is because nothing is yet ready. Examine the situation, I beg you. Monsieur le Duc and his friend Monsieur le Cardinal are at Nancy observing; one is putting on its feet an army meant to restrain the Huguenots of Flanders, whom Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou wishes to send to take possession of us; the other is despatching courier after courier to all the clergy in France, and to the Pope, urging them to adopt the Union. Monsieur le Duc de Guise knows what you do not know, gentlemen; namely, that this ancient alliance, unfortunately broken, between the Duc d'Anjou and Le Béarnais, is ready to be renewed. There is a question of occupying Spain from the side of Navarre, and of preventing them from sending us arms and money. But, before doing anything, and especially before coming to Paris, Monsieur le Duc wishes to be in a condition to fight against heresy and usurpation. But, in default of Monsieur de Guise, we have Monsieur de Mayenne, who, besides being general, is councillor, and whom I am expecting any moment.

" That means," interrupted Bussy, and it was at this point that he shrugged his shoulders; " that means that your princes are everywhere where we are not, and never where we want them to be. What is Madame de Montpensier doing, for instance."

" Monsieur, Madame de Montpensier entered Paris this morning."

" And no one saw her ? "

" Yes, monsieur."

" Who ? "

" Salcède."

" Oh ! oh ! " cried all the assembly.

" But," said Crucé, " she made herself invisible, then ? "

" Not entirely, but unapproachable, I trust."

" And how do they know that she is here ? " demanded Nicholas Poulain. " I presume it was not Salcède who told you."

" I know that she is here," replied Mayneville, " because I accompanied her as far as the Porte Saint Antoine."

" I heard that they closed the gates," interrupted Marteau, who longed for an opportunity to make a second speech.

"Yes, monsieur," replied Mayneville with his never failing courtesy, which no attack could make him forget.

"How did she have them opened then?"

"In her own way."

"And she has the power to open the gates of Paris?" said the Leaguers, jealous, and suspicious as the bourgeoise always are when allied with the nobility.

"Gentlemen," said Mayneville, "there happened this morning, at the gates of Paris, a thing which you seem to be ignorant of, or at least to realize but vaguely. The order had been given to let only those who were bearers of a card of admission enter the gates."

"By whom were the cards signed?"

"I do not know. But in front of us, at the Porte Saint Antoine, five or six men arrived, four of whom were very shabbily dressed and of very poor appearance; they were bearers of the necessary cards, and passed in before our eyes. Some of them acted with the insolent buffoonery of men who think themselves in a conquered country. Who are these men? What are these cards? Answer, gentlemen of Paris, you whose duty it is to be ignorant of nothing concerning the affairs of our city."

Thus Mayneville from the accused became the accuser, which is the highest art of oratory.

"Cards! Insolent men! Exceptional admissions to the gates of Paris! Oh! oh! What does that mean?" demanded Nicholas Poulain, dreamily.

"If you do not know these things, you who live here, how should we know them, we, who live in Lorraine, spending all our time running along the roads to bring together the two ends of this circle called the Union?"

"And how did these men come?"

"Some on foot, others on horseback; some alone, others with lackeys."

"Are they followers of the King?"

"Three or four looked like beggars."

"Are they warriors?"

"There were only two swordsmen among the six."

"Are they strangers?"

"I think they are Gascons."

"Oh!" cried some voices in a tone of scorn.

"Never mind," said Bussy; "were they Turks they should

arouse our interest. We will find out about them. Monsieur Poulain, this is your business. But all this tells us nothing of the affairs of the League."

"There is a new plan," replied Monsieur de Mayneville. "You will know to-morrow that Salcède, who had already betrayed us, and who would have betrayed us again, not only did not speak, but even retracted on the scaffold. This is due to the duchess, who, entering in the suite of one of the card-bearers, had the courage to penetrate as far as the scaffold at the risk of being crushed a thousand times, and to make herself seen by the victim at the risk of being recognized. It was at this moment that Salcède paused in his effusion; an instant later our brave hangman stopped him in his repentance. So, gentlemen, you have nothing to fear from our enterprises in Flanders. This terrible secret has been rolled into a tomb."

It was this last phrase which brought the Leaguers around Monsieur de Mayneville.

Briquet guessed their joy from their gestures. Their joy greatly troubled the worthy bourgeois, who seemed to make a sudden resolution.

He let himself slip from the funnel to the pavement of the court, and started toward the door, where, on his pronouncing the two words *Parma* and *Lorraine*, the porter gave him free exit.

Once in the street, Maître Robert Briquet drew in such a long draught of air that it was easy to understand he had held his breath some time.

The council still continued. History tells us what occurred there. Monsieur de Mayneville brought from the Guises to the future insurgents of Paris the whole plan of insurrection.

It consisted in a scheme to murder the important personages of the city known to be held in favor by the King, to run through the streets, crying: "Long live the Mass! Death to the politicians!" and so to kindle a new Saint Bartholomew from the ashes of the old; only, in this one, they were to confound the wrong-thinking Catholics with all kinds of Huguenots. In acting thus, they would be serving two Gods: the one who reigned in heaven, and the one who was to reign over France — the Eternal, and Monsieur de Guise.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CHAMBER OF HIS MAJESTY HENRY III. AT THE LOUVRE.

In that great chamber of the Louvre, which before now our readers have so often entered with us, and in which we have seen poor King Henry III. spend so many long and cruel hours, we are about to find him once more, no longer King, no longer master, but filled with despondency; pale, anxious, and given up without reserve to the persecution of all the shadows which his memory incessantly evoked under those illustrious arches.

Henry was greatly changed since the fatal death of his friends, an account of which we have given elsewhere; this grief had passed over his head like a devastating hurricane, and the poor King, who, remembering constantly that he was a man, had placed his strength and his confidence only in private affections, had seen himself robbed by jealous death of all confidence and all strength, anticipating thus the terrible moment when kings see God alone, — without friends, without a guard, and without a crown.

Henry III. had been cruelly tried: every one he loved had successively fallen around him. After Schomberg, Quélus, and Maugiron, killed in duels by Livarot and Antraguet, Saint Mégrin had been assassinated by Monsieur de Mayenne; these wounds were still fresh and bleeding. The affection he had for his two favorites, D'Épernon and Joyeuse, resembled that which a father who has lost his best loved children gives to those who are left him; while thoroughly realizing the faults of the latter, he loves them, he cares for them; he guards them in order to give death no hold over them. Henry had heaped riches on D'Épernon, yet he loved D'Épernon only by fits and starts; at certain times he even hated him. It was then that Catharine, that pitiless counsellor, in whom thought, like the lamp in a tabernacle, was always awake, — it was then that Catharine, incapable of follies, even in her youth, assumed the voice of the people, to find fault with the affections of the King.

When he emptied the treasury in order to convert the estate of La Valette into a duchy, and to aggrandize it royally, she did not say to him:

"Sire, hate these men who do not love you, or what is much worse, who love you only for themselves."

But if she saw the brow of the King wrinkle, if, in a moment of weariness, she heard him accuse D'Épernon of avarice or cowardice, she at once found the inevitable word that summed up all the griefs of the people and of the royalty against D'Épernon, and which made a new furrow in the royal hatred.

D'Épernon, only partly Gascon, had, with his cleverness and his native perversity, taken the measure of the royal weakness; he knew how to conceal his ambition, a vague ambition, the aim of which was still unknown to himself; but his covetousness took the place of a compass in directing him toward the distant and unknown world which, as yet, the future hid from him, and it was by this covetousness alone that he governed himself. If the treasury chanced to be somewhat full, D'Épernon was seen to rise and draw near, his arms rounded, his face smiling; if the treasury were empty, he disappeared, his lips scornful, his brow frowning, to shut himself up, either in his hotel or in one of his châteaux, where he cried misery, until he laid hold of the King in his weakness of heart, and drew from him some new gift.

In him favoritism had grown into a trade, a trade of which he skilfully exploited all possible revenue. At first he did not overlook in the King the least delay in payments when due; then, when later he became a courtier, and when the capricious winds of the royal favor were sufficient by frequent revenue to solidify his Gascon brains, later, we say, he consented to take upon himself a part of the work, that is, to coöperate in the receipt of the funds which he wished to make his booty.

This necessity, he well knew, was causing him to become, instead of an idle courtier, which is the best of all conditions, an active courtier, which is the worst. He very bitterly deplored the peaceful leisure of Quélus, Schomberg, and Maugiron, who in their life had not spoken of public or private affairs, and who so easily had converted favor into money, and money into pleasures; but times had changed; the iron age had succeeded the golden age; money did not come as it once did; one had to go to money, and in order to get it, dig down into the veins of the people, as in a half used-up mine. D'Épernon became resigned, and hurled himself greedily into the inextricable bramble-bushes of administration, devastating here and there along his pathway, and pressing

out money without keeping account of the curses, each time that the rattle of the gold crowns covered the voices of the complainants. The rapid and very incomplete sketch which we have traced of the character of Joyeuse may show the reader what a difference there was between the two favorites who shared, we will not say the friendship, but that large portion of influence which Henry always let those who surrounded him wield over France and himself. Joyeuse, very naturally and unconsciously, had followed the steps and adopted the tradition of Quélus, Schomberg, Maugiron, and Saint Megrin; he loved the King and unconcernedly let himself be loved by him; only all the strange rumors which had gone abroad concerning the marvellous friendship which the King had for the predecessors of Joyeuse had died with the friendship; no infamous blot soiled the almost paternal affection of Henry for Joyeuse. Belonging to a family of illustrious and honest men, Joyeuse had, at least in public, the respect of royalty, and his familiarity never passed certain bounds.

In the question of morals, Joyeuse was a real friend to Henry; but this question seldom arose. Anne was young, enthusiastic, in love, and when in love, egotistical; it was little for him to be happy through the King and to turn back the happiness to its source; it was everything for him to be happy in any way whatsoever. Brave, beautiful, rich, he shone with the triple reflection which crowns youthful brows with an aureole of love. Nature had done too much for Joyeuse, and Henry sometimes cursed nature, who had left him, a King, so little to do for his friend.

Henry thoroughly understood these two men, and loved them, no doubt, on account of the contrast. Beneath his sceptical and superstitious exterior, he hid a fund of philosophy which, without Catharine, might have developed in a remarkably useful way.

Often betrayed, Henry was never deceived.

It was therefore with this perfect understanding of the character of his friends, with this profound knowledge of their good and bad qualities, that, far from them, isolated, and in his gloomy chamber, he thought of them, of himself, of his life, and saw in shadow the funereal horizons, already outlined in the future, but not visible to many eyes less far-seeing than his own.

The affair of Salcède had greatly saddened him. Alone, between two women, at such a moment, Henry felt his absolute loneliness; the weakness of Louise grieved him; the strength of Catharine frightened him. In fact, he felt in himself that vague and eternal terror which those kings experience who are branded by fate as men through whom or with whom a race is to become extinct. To realize, in short, that, although raised above such men, this greatness has no solid foundation, to feel that you are the statue before which incense is burned, the idol which is adored, but that priests and people, worshippers and minister, bow before you or rise according to their interest, and oscillate according to their caprice, is, to a haughty spirit, the most cruel disgrace. Henry felt this, and the feeling irritated him.

And yet, from time to time, he recovered the energy of his youth, extinguished in him long before the close of that youth.

"After all," said he to himself, "why fret? I have no more wars to carry on; De Guise is at Nancy, Henry at Pau; the one is obliged to hide his ambition within himself, the other has never had any. The people are quiet, no Frenchman has seriously considered this impossible enterprise of dethroning his King; the third crown promised by the golden scissors of Madame de Montpensier is only the idle talk of a woman wounded in her pride; my mother alone is always dreaming of her phantom of usurpation, without actually being able to show me the usurper. But I, who am a man, I, who in spite of my griefs, still have a young brain, I know how much to rely on the pretenders she fears. I will make Henry of Navarre ridiculous, De Guise odious, and, sword in hand, I will scatter the foreign Leagues. By Heaven! I was not worth more at Jarnac and Moncontour than I am to-day.

"Yes," continued Henry, letting his head fall forward again on his breast; "yes, but in the meantime, I am weary, and it is death to be weary. Ah! therein lies my one real conspirator, weariness! and my mother never speaks to me of this. We shall see if any one comes to me this evening! Joyeuse made such promises to be here early; he amuses himself, but what in the devil does he do in order to amuse himself? D'Épernon? Ah! he does not amuse himself, he sulks; he has not yet attended to his bill of twenty-five thousand crowns now due; well, in faith! he may sulk as much as he pleases."

"Sire," said the voice of the usher, "Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon!"

All those who know the weariness of waiting, the feeling of injury that it engenders in regard to those expected, and the facility with which it dissipates the clouds of worry when the person appears, will comprehend the alacrity of the King in ordering a chair to be brought for the duke.

"Ah! good evening, duke," said he; "I am delighted to see you."

D'Épernon bowed respectfully.

"Why did you not come to see that wretch of a Spaniard quartered? You well knew there was room for you in my box, because I told you so."

"Sire, I was unable to come."

"You were unable?"

"I had business, sire."

"One would say, in truth, that you were my minister, with a face a yard long, and that you had come to tell me that a subsidy had not been paid," said Henry, shrugging his shoulders.

"Faith, sire," said D'Épernon, catching the ball in its bound, "your Majesty is right; the subsidy has not been paid, and I am without a crown."

"Good!" said Henry impatiently.

"But," went on D'Épernon, "it is not a question of that, and I hasten to tell your Majesty so, lest you think that such was the business that occupied me."

"Let us hear about this business, duke."

"Your Majesty knows what took place at the execution of Salcède?"

"I should think so! as I was there."

"There was an attempt made to carry off the condemned man."

"I did not see that."

"Nevertheless, such is the rumor about the city."

"A rumor without cause and without result; they did not move."

"I think your Majesty is mistaken."

"And on what do you base your belief?"

"On the fact that Salcède contradicted before the people what he had said before the judges."

"Ah! you already know that, do you?"

"I try to know all that interests your Majesty."

"Thank you; but what are you driving at with this preamble?"

"At this: a man who dies like Salcède dies a good servant, sire."

"Well! what next?"

"The master who has such servants is very fortunate; that is all."

"And you mean that I have no such servants, or rather that I no longer have them? You are right, if that is what you mean."

"That is not what I mean. Your Majesty would find, on occasion, — and I can answer for it better than any one, — servants as faithful as the master of Salcède found in him."

"The master of Salcède! The master of Salcède! For once call things by their name, all you who are around me. What is this master's name?"

"Your Majesty ought to know it better than I; you who take part in politics."

"I know what I know. Tell me what you know."

"I? I know nothing. I merely suspect many things."

"Ah!" said Henry wearied, "you come here to frighten me, and to say disagreeable things to me, do you not? Thank you, duke, I am very grateful to you for that."

"Come, now, your Majesty is unkind to me," said D'Épernon.

"I am just, though, I believe."

"No, sire. The warning of a devoted man may come to naught; but, none the less, this man has done his duty in giving the warning."

"This is my affair."

"Ah! since your Majesty takes it in that way, you are right, sire; therefore let us say no more about it."

There was silence which the King was first to break.

"Come," said he, "do not make me gloomy, duke. I am already as dismal as an Egyptian Pharaoh in his pyramid. Cheer me up."

"Ah, sire, joy cannot be commanded!"

The King struck the table angrily with his fist.

"You are an obstinate, bad friend, duke!" he cried. "Alas! alas! I did not think to lose all in losing my former subjects."

"Might I venture to remark to your Majesty that you scarcely encourage the new ones?"

Here the King made another pause, during which, for all reply, he looked with a most significant expression at the man whose fortune he had made. D'Épernon understood.

"Your Majesty reproaches me with your kindnesses," said he, in the tone of a thorough Gascon. "I do not reproach him with my devotion."

And the duke, who had not yet seated himself, took the chair which the King had had brought for him.

"La Valette, La Valette," said Henry, sadly, "you break my heart, you who have so much spirit, you who could by your good humor make me so gay and happy! God is witness that I have not thought of my brave Quélus, or Schomberg, so good, or Maugiron, so solicitous as to my honor. No, there was in those days Bussy; Bussy, who did not belong to me, to be sure, but whom I should have won had I not been afraid of giving umbrage to others; Bussy, who, alas! was the involuntary cause of their death! To what have I come that I regret even my enemies? Surely, all four were brave men. Ah, my God! do not be angry at what I am saying. What do you want, La Valette? It is not your way to give great thrusts of the rapier to every comer each hour of the day; but, dear friend, if you are not adventurous and clever, you are witty, ingenious, and occasionally you offer good counsel. You know all my affairs, like that other more humble friend with whom I never felt a single moment of weariness."

"Of whom is your Majesty pleased to speak?" asked the duke.

"You ought to resemble him, D'Épernon."

"But it is necessary for me to know whom your Majesty regrets."

"Oh! poor Chicot, where are you?"

D'Épernon rose, thoroughly piqued.

"Well! what are you going to do?" said the King.

"It seems, sire, that your Majesty is reminiscent to-day; but, in truth, that is not pleasant for every one."

"And why not?"

"Because your Majesty, without intending it, perhaps, compares me to Maître Chicot, and because I feel myself very little flattered by the comparison."

"You are wrong, D'Épernon. I can compare to Chicot only a man whom I love and who loves me. He was a true and clever servant."

And Henry heaved a deep sigh.

"It was not in order to resemble Maître Chicot, I presume, that your Majesty made me a duke and a peer?" said D'Épernon.

"Come, let us not recriminate," said the King, with so malicious a smile that the Gascon, shrewd and impudent as he was, found himself more ill at ease before this mild sarcasm than he would have been before a flagrant reproach.

"Chicot loved me," continued Henry, "and I miss him; that is all I can say. Oh! when I think that all those handsome, brave, and faithful young men have been in this very room; that over there on the armchair on which you have placed your hat, Chicot has slept more than a hundred times!"

"Perhaps he was very witty," interrupted D'Épernon; "but, at all events, he was not very respectful."

"Alas!" went on Henry, "this dear friend has now no more mind than body."

And he sadly shook his chaplet of death's heads, which made as doleful a jingle as though it had been made of real bones.

"Ah! what has become of your Chicot?" asked D'Épernon, carelessly.

"He is dead," replied Henry; "dead, like all who have loved me."

"Well, sire," resumed the duke, "I think, in truth, that he did well to die; he was growing old, much less so, however, than his jokes, and I have been told that sobriety was not his favorite virtue. Of what did the poor devil die, sire? — of indigestion?"

"Chicot died of grief, you hard heart," sharply replied the King.

"He said so to make you laugh a last time."

"That is where you are mistaken; he did not even want to sadden me by the announcement of his illness. He knew how I regretted my friends; he who so many times had seen me weep for them."

"Then it was his shadow which returned to announce his death?"

"Would to God that I might see him, even in shadow! No,

it was his friend, the worthy Prior Gorenflot, who wrote me the sad news."

"Gorenflot! who is he?"

"A holy man whom I made prior of the Jacobins, and who lives in the beautiful convent outside the Porte Saint Antoine, opposite the Faubin Cross, near Bel Esbat."

"That is good! Some poor preacher to whom your Majesty has given a priory of thirty thousand pounds with which you are careful not to reproach him."

"Are you becoming impious now?"

"If that would make your Majesty less weary I should try."

"Will you keep still, duke; you offend God!"

"Chicot was very impious, yet it seems to me that he was pardoned."

"Chicot came at a time when I could still laugh at something."

"Then your Majesty does wrong to regret him."

"And why?"

"If you can no longer laugh at anything, Chicot, gay as he was, would not be of much use to you."

"The man was good at everything, and it is not merely because of his spirits that I regret him."

"Because of what, then? Not on account of his face, I presume, for he was very homely, Maître Chicot."

"He gave good counsel."

"Well! I see that if he were living your Majesty would make him Keeper of the Seals, as you made a prior of this monk."

"Come, duke, do not laugh, I beg you, at those who have cared for me, and for whom I myself have felt some affection. Since his death Chicot is as sacred as a living friend, and when I have no wish to laugh I do not want any one else to do so."

"Oh! indeed, sire, I have no more desire to laugh than your Majesty. What I said was that a few minutes ago you were regretting Chicot for his good humor; that a few minutes ago you asked me to cheer you, while now you want me to make you sad — *Parfandious!* Oh! Pardon me, sire, that cursed oath is always escaping me."

"Well, well, now I am cooled down; now I am at the point at which you wished to see me when you began the conversation with your sinister insinuations. Come, tell me your bad

news, D'Épernon; there is always in the King the strength of the man."

"I do not doubt it, sire."

"And it is fortunate, for, poorly guarded as I am, if I did not guard myself I should be dead ten times a day."

"Which would not be displeasing to certain people I know."

"Against them, duke, I have the halberds of my Swiss."

"They are powerless to reach any distance."

"Against those whom it is necessary to reach from afar I have the muskets of my gunners."

"They are troublesome to handle at close range; to defend a royal breast good breasts are worth more than halberds and gunners."

"Alas!" said Henry, "those are what I once had, and in those breasts noble hearts. Never did anything happen to me in the time of those living ramparts called Quélus, Schomberg, Saint Luc, Maugiron, and Saint Mégrin."

"That, then, is what your Majesty regrets?" asked D'Épernon, counting on having his revenge by catching the King in the very act of egotism.

"I regret above all else the hearts that beat within those breasts," said Henry.

"Sire," said D'Épernon, "if I dared, I would remark to your Majesty that I am a Gascon, that is, far-seeing and industrious; that I try to supply by mind the qualities that nature has refused me; in a word, that I do all I can, that is to say, all that I ought to do, and that consequently I have the right to say: 'Come what may.'"

"Ah! that is how you get out of it; you come to me to make a great show of the dangers, true or false, that I run, and when you have succeeded in frightening me, you sum everything up in these words: 'Come what may!' Much obliged to you, duke."

"Your Majesty is pleased, then, to believe somewhat in these dangers?"

"Possibly; I will believe in them, if you prove to me that you can fight them."

"I believe that I can."

"You can?"

"Yes, sire."

"I know very well you have your resources, your little schemes, fox that you are!"

"Not so little."

"Let us see, then."

"Will your Majesty consent to rise?"

"For what purpose?"

"In order to come with me as far as the old buildings of the Louvre."

"By the Rue de l'Astruce?"

"Precisely; to the place where they were occupied in building a storehouse, a project which has been abandoned since your Majesty wishes no furniture except *prie-dieux* and chaplets of deaths' heads."

"At this hour?"

"Ten o'clock is striking from the clock at the Louvre; it is not very late, it seems to me."

"What shall I see in these buildings?"

"Ah! If I were to tell you, you would not come."

"It is very far, duke."

"Through the galleries one can reach it in five minutes, sire."

"D'Épernon, D'Épernon" —

"Well, sire?"

"If what you wish to show me is not very interesting, take care."

"I promise you, sire, that it will be interesting."

"Come, then," said the King, rising with an effort.

The duke took his cloak, and presented his sword to the King; then, taking a wax torch, he set out down the gallery, preceding his very Christian Majesty, who followed him with lagging steps.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DORMITORY.

Although it was as yet only ten o'clock, as D'Épernon had said, the silence of death invaded the Louvre; the wind was blowing so fiercely that they could scarcely hear the heavy footsteps of the sentinels and the grating of the drawbridges.

In less than five minutes the two men reached the buildings in the Rue de l'Astruce, which had preserved this name since the building of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois.

The duke drew a key from his bag, descended a few steps,

crossed a small court, and opened an arched door hidden by yellow bushes and partially obstructed by long grasses.

For ten steps he followed a dark passage, when he came to an inner court, from one corner of which rose a stone staircase. This stairway terminated in a vast chamber, or rather in an immense corridor.

D'Épernon had the key of this corridor also.

He opened the door gently, and called Henry's attention to the strange arrangement, which, when the door was opened, at once struck the eyes. The room was provided with forty-five beds, each of which was occupied by a sleeper. The King looked at the beds, and at the sleepers; then turning anxiously to the duke:

"Well!" he asked, "who are all these sleepers?"

"Men who sleep this evening, but who after tomorrow will no longer sleep, except in turn, you understand."

"And why will they not sleep?"

"That your Majesty may sleep."

"Explain yourself; all these men are your friends, then?"

"Chosen by me, sire, and tried like grain on the thrashing-floor; intrepid guards who will leave your Majesty no more than does your shadow, and who, gentlemen all of them, having the right to go everywhere your Majesty goes, will allow no one to approach within a sword's length of your Majesty."

"It is you who planned this, D'Épernon?"

"Ah! my God; yes, I alone, sire."

"People will laugh at it."

"No, they will be afraid."

"They are very terrible, then, your gentlemen?"

"Sire, they are a pack of hounds whom you may let go after such game as you please, and who, knowing only you, and having relations with none but your Majesty, will address themselves to you alone for light, heat, and life."

"But this will ruin me."

"Is a king ever ruined?"

"I cannot even pay the Swiss."

"Look well at these newcomers, sire, and tell me if they seem to you men who are expensive."

The King glanced down the long dormitory, which presented an aspect sufficiently worthy of attention, even for a king accustomed to beautiful architectural divisions. The long room

was divided in its entire length by a partition through which the builder had made forty-five alcoves, placed like so many chapels, one next the other, and opening into the passage at one end of which stood the King and D'Épernon.

A door in each of these alcoves gave access to a sort of adjoining room.

The result of this ingenious distribution was that each gentleman had his public life and his private life.

In public he appeared in the alcove; in private he withdrew to his little lodge.

The door of each of these little lodges opened on to a balcony, running the whole length of the building.

The King did not at first comprehend these subtle distinctions.

"Why do you show the men to me in this way, all asleep in their beds?" he asked.

"Because, sire, I thought that in this way the inspection would be easier for your Majesty; then these alcoves, each of which is numbered, have the advantage of transmitting the number to the occupant; thus each of these occupants will be, according to necessity, a man or a number."

"It is well thought out," said the King, "especially if we alone keep the key to all this arithmetic. But the poor fellows will suffocate if they always live in this hole."

"Your Majesty is going to make the rounds with me, if you so desire, and enter each room."

"Heavens! what storehouses you have made for me, D'Épernon!" said the King, casting his eyes at the chairs covered with the garments of the sleepers. "If I were to include the rags of these fellows with them, Paris would have a good laugh."

"It is a fact, sire," replied the duke, "that my Forty-Five are not very sumptuously clothed; but, sire, if they were all dukes and peers" —

"Yes, I understand," said the King, smiling, "they would cost me more than they wish to cost me."

"Well, that is it, sire."

"How much will they cost me? Let us see; that will decide me, perhaps; for in truth, D'Épernon, their appearance is not appetizing."

"Sire, I well know that they are somewhat thin, and burnt from the sun in our provinces of the south, but I was thin

and browned like them when I came to Paris; they will fatten and whiten like myself."

"Humph!" said Henry, looking sidewise at D'Épernon.

Then, after a pause:

"Do you know that your gentlemen snore like psalmists?" said the King.

"Sire, you must not judge them from seeing them now, they have dined very well this evening, you see."

"Ah! here is one who is dreaming aloud," said the King, listening with interest.

"Really?"

"Yes; what is he saying? Listen."

In fact, one of the gentlemen, with head and arms hanging over the bed, and mouth half opened, breathed a few words with a melancholy smile.

The King approached the bed on tiptoe.

"If you are a woman," said he, "flee! flee!"

"Ah! ah!" said Henry, "he is a gallant."

"What do you say to him, sire?"

"His face pleases me well enough."

D'Épernon brought his torch to the alcove.

"He has white hands, too, and a well-trimmed beard."

"He is Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges; a fine fellow, and one who will amount to something."

"He has left behind some country love, poor devil!"

"To have no other love than that of his King, sire; we will take account of his sacrifice."

"Oh! oh! there is a queer figure beyond your monsieur — what did you just now call him?"

"Ernauton de Carmainges."

"Ah! yes! Plague it! what a shirt number thirty-one has! I should call it a penitent's sack."

"That one is Monsieur de Chalabre; if he ruins your Majesty, I promise you it will not be without enriching himself somewhat."

"And that other gloomy face, which does not look as though its owner were dreaming of love."

"Which number, sire?"

"Number twelve."

"Fine swordsman, heart of bronze, a man of resources, — Monsieur de Saint Maline, sire."

"Ah! but as I reflect on it, do you know that this was quite an idea, La Valette?"

"I believe so; you may judge somewhat, sire, what effect these new watch-dogs will produce, which will leave your Majesty no more than your shadow, these mastiffs which have never been seen anywhere, and which, at the first opportunity, will show themselves in a way which will do honor to us all."

"Yes, yes, you are right; it is a good idea. But listen."

"What?"

"They will not wish to follow me like my shadow in such clothes, I presume? My body is stylish looking, and I do not wish its shadow, or rather its shadows, to disgrace it."

"Ah! sire, we return to the question of figures."

"Did you think to elude it?"

"No, on the contrary, it is in all things the fundamental question; but as to these figures, I also have had an idea."

"D'Épernon! D'Épernon!" said the King.

"What do you expect, sire? The desire to please your Majesty increases my imagination."

"Well, let us see. Tell us this idea."

"Well! if it depended on me, to-morrow morning each of these gentlemen should find on the stool that bears his rags a purse of a thousand crowns in payment for the first semester."

"A thousand crowns for the first semester! six thousand pounds a year! Come, now, you are mad, duke! A whole regiment would not cost that."

"You forget, sire, that they are to be the shadows of your Majesty; and you said yourself that you desired your shadows to be decently clad. Each will have, therefore, to take from his thousand crowns sufficient to clothe and arm himself in a style to do you honor; and on the word 'honor,' let the tether go somewhat loose for the Gascons. But in allowing fifteen hundred pounds for equipment, that would be four thousand five hundred pounds for the first year, three thousand for the second, and the others."

"That is more acceptable."

"And your Majesty consents?"

"There is only one difficulty, duke."

"What?"

"Lack of money."

"Lack of money?"

"Why! you ought to know better than any one that it is not a mere excuse I am giving you, you who have not had your allowance paid."

"Sire, I have found a way."

"Of getting money for me?"

"For your guards; yes, sire."

"Some skinflint plan," thought the King, regarding D'Épernon aside. Then aloud:

"Let us see the means," said he.

"There was imposed, six months ago this very day, a fine on the rights of game and fish."

"That is possible."

"The payment of the first semester has brought in sixty-five thousand crowns, which the treasurer was going to collect this morning, when I told him to do nothing with them; so that, instead of depositing them in the treasury he holds the tax-money at the disposition of your Majesty."

"I intended it for the wars, duke."

"And rightly, sire. The first condition of war is to have men; the first interest of the kingdom is the defence and safety of the King; in assuring the guard of the King, one fulfils all these conditions."

"The explanation is not bad; but, according to your account, I see only forty-five thousand crowns used; there would, therefore, remain twenty thousand for my regiments."

"Pardon, sire, I have disposed, by your Majesty's leave, of these twenty thousand crowns."

"Ah! you have disposed of them?"

"Yes, sire; they will be part payment on my allowance."

"I was sure of it," said the King; "you give me a guard in order to get your money."

"Oh, sire, the idea!"

"But why this particular number, forty-five?" asked the King, passing on to another idea.

"This is why, sire: The number three is primordial and divine; furthermore, it is convenient. For instance, when a cavalier has three horses, he never has to walk; the second takes the place of the first which is tired; and then there remains a third to replace the second, in case of a wound or illness. You will therefore always have three times fifteen gentlemen; fifteen for service; thirty who will rest. Each

period of service will last twelve hours, and, during these twelve hours, you will always have five on your right, five on your left, two before and three behind. Let any one try to attack you with such a guard!"

"By Heaven! it is skilfully planned, duke, and I congratulate you."

"Look at them, sire; in truth, they produce a very good appearance."

"Yes; dressed, they will not be bad."

"Do you now think that I have the right to speak of the dangers which threaten you, sire?"

"I do not deny it."

"I was right, then?"

"Yes."

"Monsieur de Joyeuse would not have had an idea like that."

"D'Épernon! D'Épernon! it is not charitable to speak ill of the absent."

"*Parfandious!* you speak much ill of those present, sire."

"Ah! Joyeuse always is with me. He was with me on the Grève to-day."

"Well, I was here, sire, and your Majesty sees that I was not wasting my time."

"Thank you, La Valette."

"By the way, sire," said D'Épernon, after an instant's silence, "I had something to ask of your Majesty."

"Indeed, duke, it would greatly surprise me if you had nothing to ask of me."

"Your Majesty is bitter to-day, sire."

"Well, no; you do not understand, my friend," said the King, whose raillery had satisfied his revenge; "or rather you understand me but slightly. I said that, having rendered me a service, you had a right to ask something of me; now ask."

"It is different, sire. Besides, what I am going to ask of your Majesty is a command."

"A command! You, colonel-general of the infantry, you wish another command; but it will overpower you!"

"I am as strong as Samson in the service of your Majesty; for that I would carry heaven and earth."

"Well, ask, then," said the King, sighing.

"I want your Majesty to give me the command of these forty-five gentlemen."

"What!" cried the King, amazed, "you wish to walk before me, behind me? You wish to carry your devotion to this point? You wish to be captain of the guard?"

"No, no, sire."

"Well, what do you want, then? Speak."

"I want these guards, my countrymen, to understand my command better than that of any other; but I shall neither precede nor follow them. I shall have a second self."

"There is something behind all this," thought Henry, shaking his head, "this devil of a man always gives in order to receive."

Then aloud:

"Very well; you shall have your command."

"In secret?"

"Yes. But who, then, will be the official head of my Forty-Five?"

"The little De Loignac."

"Ah! so much the better!"

"He pleases your Majesty?"

"Perfectly."

"Is it decided then, sire?"

"Yes, but"—

"But"—

"What rôle does he play with you, this De Loignac?"

"He is my D'Épernon, sire."

"He will cost you dear, then," growled the King.

"Your Majesty says"—

"I say that I accept."

"Sire, I am going to the treasurer to get the forty-five purses."

"This evening?"

"Must not our men find them to-morrow on their chairs?"

"That is right; go. I will return home."

"Content, sire?"

"Well enough."

"Well guarded, at all events."

"Yes, by men who sleep with closed fists."

"They will watch to-morrow, sire."

D'Épernon conducted Henry as far as the door of the corridor, then left him, saying to himself:

"If I am not King, I have guards like a king, and who cost me nothing, *parfandious!*"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SHADE OF CHICOT.

The King, as we said a moment ago, was never deceived as to his friends. He knew their qualities, good and bad, and, earthly King though he was, he could read the depths of their hearts as clearly as though he were heavenly king.

He had at once understood what D'Épernon was aiming at; but as he had expected to receive nothing in exchange for what he gave, and since, on the contrary, he had received forty-five *staffiere*[1] in exchange for sixty-five thousand crowns, the idea of the Gascon seemed to him a good one. And then it was a novelty. A poor king of France is not always liberally supplied with this merchandise, so rare even for subjects, — King Henry III. especially, who, when he had had his processions, combed his dogs, counted out his deaths' heads, and heaved his desired number of sighs, had nothing further to do.

Therefore the guard instituted by D'Épernon pleased the King, particularly because it would be commented on, and because in consequence he would be able to read on the faces of the people something else besides that which he had seen on them every day since his return from Poland ten years before.

Little by little, as he drew nearer to his chamber, in which the usher, greatly perplexed at this nocturnal and unusual excursion, was waiting, Henry developed to himself the advantages of the institution of the Forty-Five, and like all weak, enfeebled minds, he gradually began to comprehend the ideas which D'Épernon had brought to light in the conversation he had just had with him.

"Well," thought the King, "the fellows will no doubt be very brave, and perhaps devoted; some of them have prepossessing faces, and others repulsive ones; there are some, thank God, to suit every one, and then it is fine, a *cortège* of forty-five swords always ready to start from their sheaths." This last link in the chain of his thoughts brought to mind the remembrance of those other swords, so devoted, which he regretted so bitterly aloud, and still more bitterly to himself, and threw Henry into that deep sadness in which he fell so often at the time of which we are writing that it might be

[1] In Italy, tall, armed footmen in cloaks. — *Tr.*

said to be his constant state. Times so hard, men so wicked, crowns so tottering on the brows of kings, impressed upon him a second time his great wish to die or be cheered, to forget for an instant the malady which at this time, the English, our masters in melancholy, had already baptized by the name of *spleen*. He looked about for Joyeuse, then not seeing him anywhere he asked for him.

"Monsieur le Duc has not yet returned," said the usher.

"Very well. Call my valets and retire."

"Sire, the chamber of your Majesty is ready, and her Majesty the Queen has asked for the orders of the King."

Henry turned a deaf ear.

"Shall I say to her Majesty," hazarded the usher, "to lay the pillow?"

"No," said Henry, "no, I have my devotions, I have my work to attend to; moreover, I am suffering. I will sleep alone."

The usher bowed.

"By the way," said Henry, calling him back, "take these preserves from the East to the Queen. They will make her sleep."

And he handed the plate to the usher.

The King entered his room, which the valets had already prepared. Once there, Henry glanced at all the accessories, so exquisite, so minute, of the extravagant toilets which he had once made in order to be the handsomest man in Christendom, not being able to be the greatest King.

But nothing now appealed to him in favor of this forced labor to which formerly he had so bravely subjected himself. All that he once had had of the woman in this hermaphrodite collection had disappeared. Henry was like those old coquettes who have changed their mirror for a prayer-book; he had almost a horror of the objects which once he had most cherished.

Gloves, perfumed and oily; masks of fine linen impregnated with paste; chemical combinations with which to curl the hair, blacken the beard, redden the ears, and make the eyes bright: he still neglected them all, as he had already done for a long time.

"My bed!" said he with a sigh.

Two servants disrobed him, put on him a pair of drawers of fine Friesland wool, and raising him with care, slipped him between the sheets.

"His Majesty's reader," cried a voice.

For Henry, a victim of long-standing and cruel insomnia,

sometimes had himself put to sleep by being read to; now a Pole was necessary to accomplish the miracle, while formerly, that is, at first, a Frenchman had sufficed.

"No, no one," said Henry, "no reader, or let him read prayers to himself for me. But if Monsieur de Joyeuse returns bring him to me."

"If he return late, sire?"

"Alas!" said Henry, "he always returns late; but at whatever hour he comes in, you understand, bring him."

The servants extinguished the candles, lighted near the fire a perfumed lamp, which gave out a pale, bluish light, a sort of phantasmagoric diversion, with which the King had seemed greatly taken since the return of his sepulchral ideas; then, on tip-toe, they left the silent chamber.

Henry, brave in the face of real danger, had all the fears, all the weaknesses of children and women. He feared apparitions, he was afraid of phantoms, and this feeling was always with him. Being afraid, he was less weary; resembling in this the captive who, tired of the idleness of a long imprisonment, replied to those who announced to him that he was about to undergo the rack:

"Good! that will help me to pass away a moment!"

However, while following the reflection of his lamp on the wall, searching the darkest corners of the room, and trying to catch the least sound which might announce the mysterious entrance of a shade, the eyes of Henry, wearied by the day's spectacle and the walk of the evening, began to grow dim, and soon he fell asleep, or rather he grew torpid in the calm and the quiet.

But his rest did not last long. Worn out by the dull fever which was consuming his life during sleep, as well as during his waking hours, he thought he heard a noise in his room and awoke.

"Joyeuse," said he, "is that you?"

No one answered.

The light from the blue lamp had grown dim; it threw on the ceiling of sculptured oak a pale circle which turned to green the gold of the cornices.

"Alone! Still alone!" murmured the King. "Ah! the prophet is right: 'Majesty should always sigh.' He would have done better to say: 'It always sighs.' Then, after an instant's pause:

"Oh, God!" he muttered, in the form of a prayer, "give me the strength to be always alone during my life, as I shall be alone after my death!"

"Ha! ha! alone after your death; that is not certain," replied a strident voice, which vibrated like a metallic sound, a few feet from the bed. "And the worms"—

The King, aghast, sat up in bed, anxiously gazing at every article of furniture in the room.

"Ah! I know that voice," he murmured.

"That is fortunate," replied the voice.

A cold perspiration stood out on the King's forehead.

"I should say it was the voice of Chicot," he sighed.

"You burn, Henry; you burn," replied the voice.

Then Henry, throwing one leg out of the bed, perceived at some distance from the chimney, in the same armchair which he had pointed out an hour before to D'Épernon, a head, on which the fire threw one of those tawny flames which, in the background of Rembrandt alone, illumine a person whom at first glance can scarcely be seen.

The reflection descended to the arm of the chair, on which was leaning an arm, then to a bony and protruding knee, then to an instep, which formed a right angle with a nervous, thin, and abnormally long leg.

"May God help me!" cried Henry; "it is the shade of Chicot!"

"Ah! my poor Henriquet," said the voice; "you are still so foolish, then?"

"What do you mean?"

"Shades do not speak, imbecile, since they have no body, and consequently no tongue," replied the figure seated in the armchair.

"You are indeed Chicot, then," cried the King, wild with joy.

"I will decide nothing in that respect; we shall see later what I am. We shall see."

"What! then you are not dead, my poor Chicot?"

"Ah, good! there you are, screaming like an eagle. Yes; on the contrary, I am dead, a hundred times dead!"

"Chicot, my only friend!"

"At least you have this advantage over me — of always saying the same thing. You are not changed, plague it!"

"But you — you" — said the King, sadly. "Are you changed, Chicot?"

"I hope so."

"Chicot, my friend," said the King, putting his two feet on the floor; "why have you left me? Tell me?"

"Because I am dead."

"But you said just now that you were not dead."

"And I repeat it."

"What means this contradiction?"

"It means, Henry, that I am dead to some and living to others."

"And for me, what are you?"

"For you I am dead."

"Why dead for me?"

"It is easy to understand; listen."

"Yes."

"You are not master in your palace."

"What?"

"You can do nothing for those who serve you."

"Maître Chicot!"

"Let us not quarrel, or I shall get angry!"

"Yes; you are right," said the King, trembling lest the shade of Chicot should vanish. "Speak, my friend, speak."

"Well, then! I had a little affair to settle with Monsieur de Mayenne, you remember?"

"Perfectly.

"I settled it finely; I thrashed the peerless captain thoroughly; he had me sought for in order to hang me, and you, on whom I counted to defend me against this hero, you abandoned me; instead of finishing him, you became reconciled with him; what did I do then? By the help of my friend Gorenflot; I declared myself dead and buried, so that since then Monsieur de Mayenne, who was seeking for me, seeks me no more."

"Frightful courage you had to do it, Chicot! Tell me, did you not know the grief that your death would cause me?"

"Yes, it was courageous, but it was not frightful at all. I have never lived as tranquilly as since every one was persuaded that I no longer lived."

"Chicot, Chicot, my friend!" cried the King, "you frighten me; I am losing my head."

"Ah, bah! you perceive that at last, do you?"

"I know not what to do but to believe."

"Well! You must, however, decide on something; what do you believe? Let us see."

"Well, I believe that you are dead, and that you have come back."

"Then I lie; you are polite."

"You hide from me a part of the truth, at least; but pretty soon, like the spectres of olden times, you will be telling me terrible things."

"Ah! I do not deny that. Prepare yourself, then, poor King!"

"Yes, yes," continued Henry, "confess that you are a spirit raised by the Lord."

"I will confess anything you wish."

"Otherwise, how could you come here through these guarded corridors? How could you be here in my room, near me? Does the first one who comes along enter the Louvre nowadays? Is it in this way that they guard the King?"

And Henry abandoning himself to the imaginary terror which had seized him, threw himself back on his bed, ready to cover his head with the sheets.

"There! there! there!" said Chicot in a tone which hid some pity and much sympathy, "there! do not excite yourself, you have but to touch me to convince yourself."

"You are not, then, a messenger of vengeance?"

"*Ventre de biche!* Have I horns like Satan, or a flaming sword like the archangel Michael?"

"Then how did you get in?"

"You insist upon this?"

"Without doubt."

"Well, understand, then, that I still have my key; the one you gave me and which I used to wear around my neck in order to infuriate the gentlemen of your chamber, who had only the right to wear it in secret; well! with this key one can enter, and I entered."

"By the secret door?"

"Yes."

"But why did you enter to-day rather than yesterday?"

"Ah! that is true, that is the question; well, you shall know."

Henry threw aside the sheets and in the naïve tone that a child would have used:

"Tell me nothing disagreeable, Chicot," he said, "I beg you. Oh, if you knew what a pleasure it is to me to hear your voice!"

"I will tell you the truth, that is all; so much the worse if the truth is disagreeable."

"Your fear of Monsieur de Mayenne is not serious, is it?" said the King.

"On the contrary, it is very serious. You understand Monsieur de Mayenne gave me fifty blows with a stick; I took my revenge and gave him back one hundred blows with the scabbard of my sword; suppose that two blows of the scabbard are equal to one blow of the stick, and we are neck and neck; *gare la belle!* Suppose that one blow of the scabbard is equal to one blow of the stick, which perhaps is the opinion of Monsieur de Mayenne, then he owes me fifty blows of the stick or the scabbard; but I fear nothing as much as debtors of this kind, and I should not even have come here, whatever you need of me, had I not known that Monsieur de Mayenne was at Soissons."

"Well, Chicot, that being so, and since it is for me that you have returned, I will take you under my protection, and I wish" —

"What do you wish? Take care, Henriquet; every time you utter the words 'I wish,' you are about to say something foolish."

"I wish you to come back to life, and show yourself openly."

"There! I said so."

"I will protect you."

"Good!"

"Chicot, I give you my royal word."

"Bah! I have something better than that."

"What have you?"

"I have my hole, and I shall stay in it."

"I will protect you, I tell you!" cried the King with energy, standing on the step of his bed.

"Henry," said Chicot, "you will take cold; get back into bed again, I beg you."

"You are right; but you do exasperate me so," said the King, returning to his sheets. "What! when I, Henry of Valois, King of France, have plenty of Swiss, of Scotch, of French guards, and gentlemen for my protection, Monsieur Chicot is not satisfied and in safety!"

"Listen, let us see; what did you say? You have the Swiss" —

"Yes, commanded by Tocquenot."

"Good, you have the Scotch" —

"Yes, commanded by Larchant."

"Very well, you have the French guards" —

"Commanded by Crillon."

"Best of all — and then?"

"And then? I do not know if I should tell you that."

"Well, don't; who asked you to?"

"And then, a novelty, Chicot."

"A novelty?"

"Yes, imagine forty-five brave gentlemen."

"Forty-five! What do you mean?"

"Forty-five gentlemen."

"Where did you find them? Not in Paris, at all events?"

"No; but they arrived in Paris to-day."

"Yes, yes," said Chicot, illuminated by a sudden idea; "I know your gentlemen."

"Indeed!"

"Forty-five beggars who lack only the wallet."

"I did not say so."

"Faces to make one die of laughter."

"Chicot, there are among them some superb men."

"Gascons, in fact, like the colonel-general of your infantry."

"And like you, Chicot."

"Oh! but with me, Henry, it is very different. I am no longer a Gascon since I left Gascony."

"While they" —

"Quite the contrary; they were not Gascons in Gascony, and they are double Gascons here."

"Never mind, I have forty-five redoubtable swords."

"Commanded by that forty-sixth redoubtable sword called D'Épernon?"

"Not exactly."

"By whom, then?"

"By De Loignac."

"Pooh!"

"You are not going to underrate De Loignac, now?"

"I will take great care not to do so; he is my cousin in the twenty-seventh degree."

"You are all related, you Gascons."

"It is entirely different with you Valois, who are never related."

"Well, will you agree?"

"To what?"

"To my Forty-Five."

"And it is with them that you count on defending yourself?"

"Yes, by Heaven! yes," cried Henry, irritated.

Chicot, or his shade, for being no better informed on this point than the King, we are obliged to leave our reader in doubt; Chicot, we say, had let himself slip down into the arm-chair, resting his heels on the edge in such a way that his knees formed the top of an angle higher than his head.

"Well! as far as I am concerned," said he, "I have more troops than you."

"Troops? You have troops?"

"Well, why not?"

"What troops?"

"You shall see. In the first place, I have the entire army which the Guises are forming in Lorraine."

"Are you crazy?"

"No, a real army, six thousand men, at least."

"But come; to what purpose should you, who are so afraid of Monsieur de Mayenne, be defended by the soldiers of Monsieur de Guise?"

"Because I am dead!"

"Again this joke!"

"But it was with Chicot that Monsieur de Mayenne was angry. I have therefore taken advantage of this death to change my body, my name, and my social position."

"Then you are no longer Chicot?" said the King.

"No."

"Who are you, then?"

"I am Robert Briquet, former merchant and Leaguer."

"You a Leaguer, Chicot?"

"A mad one; who acts, mark you, only on condition of not seeing Monsieur de Mayenne too closely; I have for my personal defence, I, Briquet, member of the sacred Union, in the first place, the army of the Lorraines, six thousand men; remember the figures."

"I will."

"Next, almost one hundred thousand Parisians."

"Famous soldiers!"

"Famous enough to greatly trouble you, my prince. Then, one hundred thousand and six thousand — one hundred and six thousand; finally the Parliament, the Pope, the Spaniards, Monsieur le Cardinal de Bourbon, the Flemish, Henry of Navarre, and the Duke of Anjou."

"Are you beginning to exhaust the list?" said Henry, impatiently.

"Not at all! there still remain three kinds of people."

"Tell me who they are."

"Who greatly complain of you."

"Tell me who they are."

"First, the Catholics."

"Ah! yes, because I have exterminated only three-quarters of the Huguenots."

"Then the Huguenots, because you have exterminated three-quarters of them."

"Ah! yes; and the third?"

"What do you say to the politicians, Henry?"

"Ah! yes, those who want neither me nor my brother nor Monsieur de Guise."

"But who very much want your brother-in-law of Navarre."

"Provided that he would abjure."

"Fine business! and how that would embarrass him, would it not?"

"Oh, as to that! but the men of whom you tell me" —

"Well?"

"Are all France."

"Exactly; they are my troops, mine, who am a Leaguer. Now come, let us add up and compare."

"We are joking, are we not, Chicot?" said Henry, feeling certain shivers run through his veins.

"As though it were the time to joke, when you are alone against the whole world, my poor Henriquet!"

Henry assumed an air of dignity thoroughly royal.

"Alone I am," said he, "but alone also will I command. You show me an army; very good. Now show me a leader. Oh! you are going to mention Monsieur de Guise; do you not see that I hold him at Nancy? Monsieur de Mayenne? You yourself admit that he is at Soissons. The Duke of Anjou?

You know that he is at Brussels. The King of Navarre? He is at Pau; while as to myself, I am alone, it is true, but free, and watching the coming of the enemy, as from the midst of a plain the hunter who is prepared for it sees his game issue from the neighboring woods."

Chicot scratched his nose. The King thought him conquered.

"What have you to reply to that?" asked Henry.

"That you are always eloquent, Henry; your tongue is still left to you; it is, in truth, more than I thought, and I offer you my very sincere congratulations; I shall attack only one thing in your discourse."

"Which?"

"Oh! my God! nothing, or almost nothing, a figure of rhetoric; I shall attack your comparison."

"In what respect?"

"In that you pretend you are the hunter on the watch for the game, while I say that, on the contrary, you are the game that the hunter is tracking into his seat."

"Chicot!"

"Come, man-lying-in-wait, whom have you seen come? Tell me."

"No one, by Heaven!"

"Yet some one has come."

"Among those of whom I told you?"

"No, not exactly."

"Who?"

"A woman."

"My sister Margot?"

"No, the Duchess of Montpensier."

"She! In Paris?"

"Yes! My God, yes!"

"Well! Even 'if that be so, since when was I afraid of a woman?"

"That is true; one should fear only men. But wait a bit. She comes as an advance courier; you understand? She comes to announce the arrival of her brother."

"The arrival of Monsieur de Guise?"

"Yes."

"And you think that that will embarrass me?"

"Oh! As for you, nothing embarrasses you."

"Hand me the ink and paper."

"What for? To sign an order for Monsieur de Guise to remain at Nancy?"

"Exactly. The idea is good, since it came to me at the same time."

"Execrable, on the contrary!"

"Why?"

"He will no sooner have received this order than he will imagine his presence is necessary in Paris, and he will hasten hither."

The King felt his anger mounting to his brow. He looked crossly at Chicot.

"If you have returned only to bring me such tidings you might well have remained where you were."

"What would you have, Henry? Phantoms are not flatterers."

"You admit, then, that you are a phantom?"

"I have never denied it."

"Chicot!"

'Come! Do not get angry, for, near-sighted as you are, you would become blind. Did you not tell me that you kept your brother in Flanders?"

"Yes, certainly; and I maintain that it is good policy."

"Now, listen, and let us not quarrel: for what purpose do you think that Monsieur de Guise remains at Nancy?"

"To organize an army there."

"Good! keep calm. For what does he intend this army?"

"Ah! Chicot, you weary me with all these questions."

"Well, be weary, Henry! You will sleep the better for it later on, I promise you. We said that he intended this army"—

"To fight the Huguenots in the north."

"Or rather to annoy your brother of Anjou, who has had himself appointed Duke of Brabant, who is trying to build for himself a little throne in Flanders, and who is constantly asking aid of you, in order to carry out this design."

"Aid which I am always promising but which I am never sending him, be it understood."

"To the great joy of Monsieur le Duc de Guise. Well, Henry, a word of advice."

"What is it?"

"If you feigned once to send him this promised aid, if this aid proceeded to Brussels, need it go more than half way?"

"Ah! yes," cried Henry; "I understand; Monsieur de Guise would not stir from the frontier."

"And the promise which Madame de Montpensier has made to us Leaguers, that Monsieur de Guise would be in Paris within eight days" —

"This promise would come to naught."

"It is you who have said it, my master," said Chicot, quietly. "Well, what think you of the advice, Henry?"

"I think it good — yet" —

"Well, what?"

"While these two gentlemen are occupied with each other up there in the north" —

"Ah! yes, the south, is it not? You are right, Henry; it is from the south that the storms come."

"In the meantime will not my third scourge be put in motion? You know what Le Bearnais is doing?"

"No, the devil!"

"He is claiming" —

"What?"

"The towns that form the dowry of his wife."

"Bah! imagine the insolent, whom the honor of being allied to the house of France does not suffice, and who allows himself to claim that which belongs to him!"

"Cahors, for instance, — as if it were good policy to abandon such a town to the enemy!"

"No, indeed, that would not be good policy; but it would be that of an honest man, for instance."

"Monsieur Chicot!"

"Let us pretend that I have said nothing; you know that I do not interfere with your family affairs."

"But that does not trouble me; I have my own ideas."

"Good!"

"Let us return to the most urgent."

"To Flanders?"

"I will send some one, then, to Flanders, to my brother — But whom shall I send? To whom can I trust a mission of this importance?"

"Well!"

"Ah! I have it!"

"I too."

"You shall go, Chicot."

"I go to Flanders? I?"

"Why not?"

"A dead man go to Flanders! Come, now!"

"Since you are no longer Chicot, but Robert Briquet" —

"Good! a bourgeois, a Leaguer, a friend of Monsieur de Guise, carrying out the duties of ambassador to Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou."

"That is to say you refuse?"

"Yes, by Heaven!"

"That you disobey me?"

"I disobey you! Do I owe you obedience?"

"You do not owe me obedience, wretched man?"

"Have you ever given me anything that holds me to you? The little I have comes to me by inheritance; I am a beggar, and unknown. Make me duke and peer; raise to a marquisate my estate of Chicoterie; endow me with five hundred thousand crowns, and then we will talk embassy."

Henry was about to answer and offer one of the good reasons that kings always find when such reproaches are made to them, when they heard the massive velvet portière slide on its rod.

"Monsieur le Duc de Joyeuse!" said the voice of the usher.

"Ah! *Ventre de biche*, here is your man!" cried Chicot. Find me an ambassador who would better represent you than Monsieur Anne; I defy you to do so!"

"Truly," murmured Henry, "this devil of a man gives better advice than I have ever had from any of my ministers."

"Ah! you admit that, then?" said Chicot.

And he sank back in the armchair, taking the shape of a ball, so that the most skilful sailor of the kingdom, accustomed to distinguish the smallest dot on the horizon, would not have noticed anything beyond the carving of the deep armchair in which he was lost.

Monsieur de Joyeuse had in vain been Grand Admiral of France, for he saw no more there than any one else.

The King gave a cry of delight on perceiving his young favorite, and held out his hand.

"Sit down, Joyeuse, my child," said he to him. "My God! You come home late!"

"Sire!" replied Joyeuse, "your Majesty is very kind to notice it."

And the duke, approaching the bed, seated himself on the pillows, embroidered in flower-patterns, that were scattered on the steps.

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE DIFFICULTY THAT A KING HAS IN FINDING GOOD AMBASSADORS.

With Chicot still invisible in his armchair, Joyeuse half reclining on the cushions, Henry softly rolled up in his bed, the conversation began.

"Well, Joyeuse," said Henry, "have you thoroughly scoured the city?"

"Why, yes, sire; pretty thoroughly, thank you," carelessly replied the duke.

"How quickly you disappeared from the Grève!"

"Listen, sire; frankly, it was not over-amusing; and then I do not like to see men suffer."

"Pitiful heart!"

"No, selfish heart; the suffering of others affects my nerves."

"You know what took place?"

"Where, sire?"

"On the Grève."

"Faith, no!"

"Salcède denied."

"Ah!"

"You take that very indifferently, Joyeuse."

"I?"

"Yes."

"I will admit to you, sire, that I did not attach great importance to what he might say; moreover, I was sure that he would deny."

"But since he had confessed."

"All the more reason. The first avowals put the Guises on their guard; they worked while your Majesty remained quiet; it was inevitable."

"What! you foresaw such things, and did not tell me?"

"Am I minister, to talk politics?"

"Let us leave that question, Joyeuse."

"Sire" —

"I have need of your brother."

"My brother, like myself, sire, is entirely at your Majesty's service."

"I may count on him, then?"

"Without doubt."

"Well, I wish to charge him with a little mission."

"Outside of Paris?"

"Yes."

"In that case, sire, it is impossible."

"How so?"

"Du Bouchage cannot leave just now."

Henry raised himself on his elbow and looked at Joyeuse with wide-open eyes.

"What does that mean?" said he.

Joyeuse bore the questioning look of the King with the greatest serenity.

"Sire," said he, "it is the easiest thing in the world to understand. Du Bouchage is in love, but he made a bad start in the affair: he set out on the wrong track, so that the poor boy is growing thinner and thinner."

"Indeed," said the King, "I have noticed it."

"And is, by Heaven, becoming sad, as though he lived at the court of your Majesty."

A kind of grunt, coming from the corner of the chimney, interrupted Joyeuse, who, thoroughly astonished, looked around.

"Pay no attention to that, Anne," said the King, laughing, "it is some dog who is dreaming on a chair. You were saying, then, my friend, that this poor Du Bouchage was growing sad."

"Yes, sire, as sad as death; it seems that somewhere he met a woman of funereal disposition — terrible things, these meetings. However, with this kind of a character one can succeed just as well as with light-hearted women; the whole thing consists in knowing how to go to work."

"Ah! you would not have been embarrassed, libertine!"

"Come! you call me libertine because I love women."

Henry heaved a sigh.

"You say that this woman is of a funereal disposition?"

"According to Du Bouchage, at least; I do not know her."

"And in spite of this sadness, you would succeed, would you?"

"By Heaven! it is only a question of working by contrasts; I know no serious difficulties except with women of medium temperament; those demand, on the part of the besieger, a

union of kindness and severity which few people succeed in combining. Du Bouchage, then, has fallen upon a sombre woman, and his love is a black one."

"Poor boy!" said the King.

"You understand, sire," continued Joyeuse, that no sooner had he taken me into his confidence than I set about to cure him."

"So that" —

"So that, at present, the cure is begun."

"He is already less in love?"

"No, sire; but he hopes the woman may become more in love, which is a more agreeable method of curing people than to take away their love from them; so from to-night, instead of sighing in unison with the lady, he is going to enliven her by every possible means; this evening, for instance, I sent to his mistress thirty or so musicians from Italy, who will do their utmost beneath her balcony."

"Poof!" said the King, "that is ordinary."

"Ordinary? Thirty musicians who have not their equal in the whole world!"

"Ah! the devil! when I was in love with Madame de Condé they could not distract me with music."

"Yes, but were you in love, sire?"

"Madly," said the King.

A fresh grunt was heard, which greatly resembled a mocking laugh.

"You see well enough that it is quite a different thing, sire," said Joyeuse, vainly endeavoring to discover whence came the strange interruption. "The lady, on the contrary, is as indifferent as a statue, as cold as an icicle."

"And you think that music will melt the icicle, animate the statue?"

"Certainly I think so."

The King shook his head.

"Well! I do not say," continued Joyeuse, "that at the first stroke of the bow the lady will throw herself into the arms of Du Bouchage; no, but she will be affected because so much fuss is made over her; little by little she will grow accustomed to the amusement, and if she does not become used to it, well, there still remain comedy, jugglers, magic, poetry, horses, every foolishness on earth, in short; so that if gayety does not return to this beautiful lonely lady, at least she will return to Du Bouchage."

"I hope so, for his sake," said Henry; "but let us leave Du Bouchage, since it is hard for him to give up Paris at present. It is not indispensable to me that he should be the one to accomplish this mission; but I hope that you, who give such good advice, have not, like him, become a slave to some sweet passion?"

"I?" cried Joyeuse, "I have never been so perfectly free in my life."

"That is fine; so you have nothing to do?"

"Absolutely nothing, sire."

"But I thought you were in love with a beautiful lady?"

"Ah, yes, the mistress of Monsieur de Mayenne; a woman who adored me."

"Well?"

"Well, imagine! this evening after having given the lesson to Du Bouchage, I left him to go to her; I arrived there with my head full of the theories I had just developed; I swear to you, sire, that I believed myself almost as much in love as Henri; well, I found a woman trembling, frightened. My first thought was that I was disturbing some one. I strove to reassure her; in vain. I questioned her; she did not reply. I wanted to embrace her; she turned aside her head, and when I frowned, she became angry, rose, we quarrelled, and she told me that she would never again be at home when I called."

"Poor Joyeuse!" said the King, laughing. "And what did you do?"

"By Heaven, sire, I took my sword and my cloak, I made a low bow, and left without once looking back!"

"Hurrah, Joyeuse, that was brave!" said the King.

"Much more brave, sire, since it seemed to me that I heard the poor girl sigh."

"Are you not going to repent of your stoicism?" said Henry.

"No, sire; if I had repented a single instant I should have run back very quickly, you understand; but nothing will rid me of the idea that the poor woman gave me up in spite of herself."

"And yet you came away?"

"Here I am."

"And you will not return?"

"Never. If I were as stout as Monsieur de Mayenne I might; but as I am thin I have a right to be proud."

"My friend," said Henry, seriously, "this rupture is very unfortunate for your safety."

"I do not deny it, sire; but in the meantime I am going to be terribly bored for a week, having nothing more to do, and not knowing what is to become of me. So some delightful ideas of idleness have occurred to me; it is amusing to be bored, really, — I have not been accustomed to it, and I shall find it *distingué*."

"I verily believe it is *distingué*," said the King. "I made it fashionable."

"This is my plan, sire; I thought it out on my way back from the square of Notre Dame to the Louvre. I will have myself brought here every day in a litter; your Majesty will say your prayers, I will read books on chemistry or on navigation, which will be still better, since I am a sailor. I shall have some little dogs which I will teach to play with yours, or rather some little cats, for they are more graceful. Then we will eat cream, and Monsieur d'Épernon will tell us stories. I, too, wish to grow fat; then, when Du Bouchage's lady from sad shall have become gay, we will seek another who from gay shall become sad; that will be a change for us; but all this without moving, sire; one is comfortable only when seated, and very comfortable only when in bed. Oh, the good pillows, sire! It is easy to see that the upholsterers of your Majesty work for a king who is bored."

"Fie, Anne!" said the King.

"Why 'fie'?"

"A man of your age and rank becoming idle and fat! What an ugly idea!"

"I do not think so, sire."

"I will give you something with which to occupy yourself."

"If it is boresome I shall like it greatly."

A third grunt was heard; one would have said that the dog was laughing at the words Joyeuse had just uttered.

"That is a very intelligent dog," said Henry, "he guesses what I want you to do."

"What do you want me to do, sire. Let us hear about it."

"You are to put on your riding-boots."

Joyeuse made a movement of terror.

"Oh! no, do not ask that of me, sire; it is against all my ideas."

"You are to mount your horse."

Joyeuse gave a start.

"My horse! No; I go now only in a litter; your Majesty did not understand, then?"

"Come, Joyeuse, a truce to jesting, do you hear me? You are to put on your boots and mount your horse."

"No, sire," replied the duke, with the greatest seriousness, "that is impossible."

"And why impossible?" demanded Henry in anger.

"Because — because — I am an admiral"

"Well?"

"And because admirals do not ride horses"—

"Ah! that is it!" said Henry.

Joyeuse answered by one of those nods of the head such as children give when they are too stubborn to obey and too timid to answer.

"Well! So be it! Monsieur l'Amiral de France, you shall not go on horseback; you are right, it is not suitable for a sailor to go on horseback. The way for a sailor to travel is by boat or galley; you will therefore immediately set out for Rouen, by boat; at Rouen you will find your admiral's galley; you will at once go on board, and you will set sail for Antwerp."

"For Antwerp!" cried Joyeuse as hopelessly as if he had received orders to leave for Canton or Valparaiso.

"I believe I said so," replied the King in an icy tone, which established without question his right as chief and his will as sovereign. "I believe I said so, and I do not wish to repeat it."

Joyeuse, without showing the slightest opposition, fastened his cloak, placed his sword under his arm, and took his velvet toque from an armchair.

"What trouble I have in being obeyed, by Heaven!" continued Henry, grumbling; "if I sometimes forget that I am master, every one else at least should remember it."

Joyeuse, mute and cold, bowed, and according to etiquette placed his hand on the guard of his sword.

"Your orders, sire?" said he, in a voice which by its tone of submission at once changed the will of the monarch to melting wax.

"You will proceed," said he, "to Rouen, where I wish you to embark, unless you prefer to go by land to Brussels."

Henry waited for a word from Joyeuse. The latter contented himself with a bow.

"Do you prefer the land route?" asked Henry.

"I have no preference, when it is a question of carrying out an order, sire," replied Joyeuse.

"Come! go! Sulk, cross-patch!" cried Henry. "Ah! kings have no friends!"

"He who gives orders can expect only to find servants," replied Joyeuse, solemnly.

"Monsieur!" replied the King, hurt. "You will go, then, to Rouen; you will board your galley; you will rally the garrisons of Caudebec, Harfleur, and Dieppe, which I shall have replaced; you will put them on board six transports, which you will place at the service of my brother, who is waiting for the aid I promised him."

"My commission, if you please, sire?" said Joyeuse.

"And since when," replied the King, "have you given up acting in virtue of your powers as admiral?"

"I have no right but to obey, and as much as I can, sire, I avoid all responsibility."

"Very well, Monsieur le Duc, you will receive the commission at your hotel when it is time to leave."

"And when will that be, sire?"

"In an hour."

Joyeuse bowed respectfully and started towards the door.

The heart of the King almost broke.

"What!" said he, "not even the courtesy of an adieu! Monsieur l'Amiral, you are not very civil; but that reproach is often made to sailors. Well, perhaps I shall have more satisfaction from my colonel-general of infantry."

"You must pardon me, sire," murmured Joyeuse, "but I am as yet a poorer courtier than sailor, and I know that your Majesty regrets what you have done for me."

And he went out, closing the door with violence behind the portière, which swelled out, blown by the wind.

"So that is how I am loved by those for whom I have done so much!" cried the King. "Ah! Joyeuse! ungrateful Joyeuse!"

"Well! are you not going to call him back?" said Chicot approaching the bed. "Because by chance you have shown a little strength, see how you repent!"

"Listen," replied the King, "you are charming! Do you think it would be pleasant to go to sea in the month of October, in the midst of rain and wind? I should indeed like to see you there, egoist!"

"You are at liberty to, great King. You are at liberty to!"

"To see you up hill and down dale?"

"Up hill and down dale; just at present my greatest desire is to travel."

"So if I were to send you somewhere, as I have just sent Joyeuse, you would accept?"

"Not only would I accept, but I beg for it, I implore."

"A mission?"

"A mission."

"You would go to Navarre?"

"I would go to the devil, great King."

"Are you jesting, buffoon?"

"Sire, I was not over-gay during my life, and I swear to you that I have been much sadder since my death."

"But you refused just now to leave Paris!"

"My gracious sovereign, I was wrong, very, very wrong, and I repent."

"So that you now desire to leave Paris?"

"At once, illustrious King; this very instant, great monarch."

"I no longer understand you," said Henry.

"Then you did not hear the words of the Grand Admiral of France?"

"What words?"

"Those in which he announced his rupture with the mistress of Monsieur de Mayenne."

"Yes, well; what of that?"

"If this woman, in love with a charming fellow like the duke, for Joyeuse is charming" —

"Without doubt."

"If this woman sends him away with a sigh, it is because she has a motive."

"Probably; otherwise she would not send him away."

"Well! do you know her motive for this?"

"No."

"You do not guess it?"

"No."

"It is that Monsieur de Mayenne is about to return."

"Oh! oh!" said the King.

"You understand at last? I congratulate you!"

"Yes, I understand, but" —

"But?"

"I do not find your reason very strong."

"Give me your reasons, Henry, I ask no better than to find them excellent; give them to me."

"Why did this woman not break with De Mayenne, instead of dismissing Joyeuse? Do you suppose that Joyeuse would not have been glad to conduct Monsieur de Mayenne to the Pré-aux-Clercs, and put a hole through his great belly? He has a sharp sword, our Joyeuse."

"True; but if Joyeuse has a sharp sword, Monsieur de Mayenne has a treacherous dagger. Remember Saint Mégrin."

Henry heaved a sigh, and raised his eyes to heaven.

"A woman who is really in love is not anxious to have her lover killed; she prefers to leave him, in order to gain time; she prefers, most of all, not to be killed herself. They are devilishly brutal in that dear house of De Guise."

"Ah! you may be right."

"That is very fortunate."

"Yes, and I begin to believe that De Mayenne will return; but you, Chicot, are not a woman, timid and in love."

"I, Henry, am a prudent man, a man who has an open account, a prearranged affair with Monsieur de Mayenne. If he finds me, he will begin again; he is a player to make one shudder, this good Monsieur de Mayenne!"

"Well!"

"Well, he will play so well that I will receive a blow from his knife."

"Bah! I know my Chicot; he does not receive without giving back."

"You are right; I would give him ten blows, which would split him open."

"So much the better; the affair would be settled."

"So much the worse, by Heaven! On the contrary, so much the worse! His family would cry out terribly; you would have the whole League on your hands, and some fine morning you would say to me: 'Chicot, my friend, excuse me, but I am obliged to have you put on the rack.'"

"I would say that?"

"You would say that, and what is worse, you would even do it, great King. Therefore I prefer the affair to turn out otherwise; you understand? I am not badly off as I am, and I want to stay so. You see, all these arithmetical progressions, applied to rancor, seem to me dangerous. I will therefore go to Navarre, if you will kindly send me."

"I certainly will."

"I await your orders, gracious prince."

And Chicot assumed the same attitude as Joyeuse.

"But," said the King, "you do not know if the mission will suit you."

"From the moment I asked you for it."

"You see, Chicot," said Henry, "I have certain ideas of making trouble between Margot and her husband."

"Divide in order to reign," said Chicot; "a hundred years ago this was the A B C of politics."

"You have no repugnance?"

"Does that concern me?" replied Chicot; "you will do as you please, great prince; you need not render an account to me, and provided I am trustworthy — Oh! as to that, you understand, I am sure."

"But still," said Henry, "you must know what to say to my brother-in-law."

"I say something? No, no, no!"

"How, no, no, no?"

"I will go where you wish, but I will say nothing. There is a proverb about that: too much flattery"—

"So you refuse, then?"

"I refuse the words, but I accept the letter. He who bears words always has some responsibility; he who presents a letter is dismissed at second hand."

"Well! so be it. I will give you a letter; that comes into my policy."

"See how it turns out! Give it to me."

"What do you say?"

"I say, give it to me."

And Chicot extended his hand.

"Ah! do not imagine that a letter like this can be written at once; it must be composed, reflected on, weighed."

"Well, weigh, reflect, compose; I will come back for it to-morrow at daybreak."

"Why do you not sleep here?"

"Here?"

"Yes, in your armchair."

"Plague it! that is done with. I shall sleep no more at the Louvre; a phantom seen sleeping in an armchair — how absurd!"

"But, nevertheless," said the King, "I want you to know

my intentions in regard to Margot and her husband. You are a Gascon; my letter will cause a sensation at the court of Navarre; you will be questioned; you will have to answer. The devil! you represent me; I do not want you to appear like a fool."

"My God!" said Chicot, shrugging his shoulders, "what an obtuse mind you have, great King! Do you imagine that I am going to carry a letter two hundred and fifty miles without knowing what it contains? Pray be easy, *ventre de biche!* at the first street corner, under the first tree I come to, I shall open your letter. Do you mean to say that for ten years you have sent ambassadors to all parts of the world, and you know no better than that? Come, put your body and soul to sleep; I will return to my solitude."

"Where is your solitude?"

"In the cemetery of the Grand Innocents, great prince."

Henry looked at Chicot with the astonishment which, for the two hours since his return, he had been unable to drive from his eyes.

"You were not expecting that, were you?" said Chicot, taking his cap and cloak. "However, this is what it is to have relations with those of the other world! Well, till to-morrow, I or my messenger."

"Good! but it will be necessary for your messenger to have a password, that it may be known he comes from you, and that the doors may be opened to him."

"Wonderful! If it is I myself, I shall come for myself; if it is my messenger, he will come for my shade."

And with these words, Chicot disappeared so softly that the superstitious mind of Henry wondered if it were really a body or a spirit which had passed through the door without causing it to creak, and under the portière without stirring one of its folds.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW AND FOR WHAT REASON CHICOT DIED.

Chicot, a real body, with all due deference to those of our readers who are sufficient believers in the marvellous to suppose that we have had the audacity to introduce a ghost into this narrative, — Chicot had gone, then, having told the King, with his customary raillery, all the truths he had to tell him.

This is what had happened.

After the death of the friends of the King, since the troubles and the conspiracies fomented by the De Guises, Chicot had begun to reflect.

Brave, as we know, and careless, he nevertheless set a great value on life, which amused him, as is the case with all fine intellects.

It is only the fools who are bored in this world and who seek distraction in the next.

The result of the reflection we have mentioned was, that the revenge of Monsieur de Mayenne seemed to Chicot more formidable than the protection of the King was efficacious; and he said to himself, with the practical philosophy which distinguished him, that in this world nothing which is really done can be undone; so that all the halberds and all the courts of justice of the King of France could not mend, slight as it might be, any opening which the knife of Monsieur de Mayenne could make in the doublet of Chicot.

He had therefore made up his mind, like a man wearied with the rôle of jester, which every moment he wanted to change to a serious one, and with his intimacy with royalty, which in those times was leading him straight to ruin.

Chicot, therefore, had begun by placing between the sword of Monsieur de Mayenne and his own skin the greatest possible distance.

With this end in view, he set out for Beaune, with the triple object of leaving Paris, embracing his friend Gorenflot, and tasting the famous wine of 1550, which was so warmly discussed in the famous letter which concludes our history of *La Dame de Monsoreau*. Let us admit that the consolation was efficacious; at the end of two months, Chicot perceived that he was growing visibly stouter, and that this helped wonderfully to dis-

guise him ; but he perceived also that in growing stout he was becoming more attached to Gorenflot than was fitting for a man of intelligence.

Mind therefore prevailed over matter.

After Chicot had drunk some hundred bottles of the famous wine of 1550, and devoured the twenty-two volumes which composed the library of the priory, and in which the prior had read the Latin axiom *Bonum vinum lætificat cor hominis*, Chicot felt a great weight in his stomach and a great void in his brain.

"I would gladly turn monk," thought he, "but with Gorenflot I should be too much master, and in any other abbey I should not be master enough. To be sure the frock would forever disguise me in the eyes of Monsieur de Mayenne ; but by all the devils ! there are other means besides ordinary ones ; let us look about. I have read in another book — it is not in Gorenflot's library — *Quære et invenies.*"

Chicot looked about, therefore, and this is what he found. For the time it was novel enough.

He opened his heart to Gorenflot, and begged him to write to the King under his dictation.

Gorenflot wrote with difficulty, it is true, but finally he wrote that Chicot had retired to the priory, that his grief at being obliged to be separated from his master, when the latter became reconciled to Monsieur de Mayenne, had undermined his health, that he had tried to struggle against it by distractions, but that grief had been too strong, and that at last he had succumbed.

For his part, Chicot himself had written a letter to the King.

This letter, dated 1580, was divided into five paragraphs.

Each of these paragraphs was supposed to have been written a day apart, and according as his disease made progress.

The first was written and signed with a firm hand. The second was traced with a less steady hand, and the signature, although still legible, was already very shaky.

He had written *Chic* . . . at the end of the third, *Ch* . . . at the end of the fourth. Finally there was a *C* . . . with an ink-spot at the end of the fifth.

This ink-spot from a dying man produced the most painful impression on the King.

This explains why he had thought Chicot a phantom and a spirit.

We would gladly give Chicot's letter, but Chicot, as they would say to-day, was a very eccentric man, and as the style is the man, his epistolary style especially was so eccentric that we do not dare to reproduce the letter here, whatever the effect might be.

But it may be found in the *Mémoires de l'Étoile*. It is dated 1580, as we have said, "the year of the great cuckoldoms," added Chicot. At the close of this letter, so that the interest of Henry might not grow cold, Gorenflot stated that since the death of his friend, the priory of Beaune had become odious to him, and that he preferred Paris.

It was this postscript especially that Chicot had had great difficulty in drawing from Gorenflot's fingers. Gorenflot, on the other hand, found it wonderfully pleasant at Beaune, as did Panurge also.

He piteously observed to Chicot that wine is always adulterated when one is not on hand to choose it on the spot. But Chicot promised the worthy prior to come in person every year to provide him with the necessary Romance, Volney, and Chambertin, and as on this point, as on many others, Gorenflot recognized the superiority of Chicot, he ended by yielding to the solicitations of his friend. On his part, in reply to the letter from Gorenflot and to the last adieux of Chicot, the King had written with his own hand:

"Monsieur le Prieur, you will give a holy and poetic burial to poor Chicot, whom I regret with all my soul, for he was not only a devoted friend, but also a very good gentleman, notwithstanding the fact that he could never trace his genealogy further back than his third great-grandfather. You will surround him with flowers, and arrange that he may rest in the sunlight, which, as he was from the south, he greatly loved. As to you, whom I honor much more for the grief which I share, if you make known your wish to do so, you will leave your priory of Beaune. I have too much need in Paris of devoted men and good priests to keep you at a distance. Consequently I appoint you prior of the Jacobins, your residence being fixed near the Porte Saint Antoine, in Paris; a quarter which our poor friend particularly loved.

"Your affectionate Henry, who begs you not to forget him in your holy prayers."

One may imagine whether such a letter coming directly from the royal hand caused the prior to open wide his eyes, whether he admired the power of Chicot's genius, and whether he hastened to take his flight towards the honors that awaited him. For, it may be remembered, ambition had already pushed one of its clinging suckers into the heart of Gorenflot, whose Christian name had always been *Modeste*, and who, since he had been prior of Beaune, called himself Dom Modeste Gorenflot. Everything happened according to the wishes of the King and of Chicot. A bundle of thorns, intended to represent, physically and allegorically, the dead body, had been buried in the sunshine, in the midst of flowers, beneath a beautiful vine stock. Then, once dead and buried in effigy, Chicot had assisted Gorenflot in moving.

Dom Modeste saw himself installed with great pomp in the priory of the Jacobins.

Chicot chose the night to glide into Paris.

He had bought, near the Porte Bussy, a small house which had cost him three hundred crowns. When he wished to see Gorenflot, he could reach him by three routes: one through the city, which was the shortest; one along the banks of the river, which was the most poetic; and lastly, the one which ran along the walls of Paris, and which was the safest.

But Chicot, who was a dreamer, almost always chose the one along the Seine; and as, in those times, the river was not embanked between stone walls, the water, as the poet says, came lapping up against its wide shores, along which the inhabitants of the Cité could see the long silhouette of Chicot outlined in the clear moonlight.

Once settled, and having changed his name, Chicot set to work to change his face; he called himself Robert Briquet, as we already know, and walked with a slight stoop; then anxiety and the successive return of five or six years had made him almost bald, so that his hair, which formerly had been curly and black, had, like the river at its ebb, retired from his forehead toward the nape of his neck.

Moreover, as we have said, he had worked at the art, dear to ancient mimics, of changing, by clever contractions, the natural play of his muscles and the habitual play of his features.

The result of this assiduous study was that seen in the light of day, and when he wished to give himself the trouble, Chicot was a veritable Robert Briquet, that is, a man whose mouth

went from ear to ear, whose chin touched his nose, and whose eyes squinted enough to make one shudder. This was done without grimaces, and not without a certain charm for lovers of change, since from being fine, long, and angular, his face had become wide, smiling, obtuse, and silly-looking. It was only his long arms and legs which Chicot could not shorten; but, as he was very industrious, he had, as we have said, bent his back, and this made his arms seem almost as long as his legs. He joined to these physiognomic exercises, the precaution of being intimate with no one.

In short, out of shape as he was, he could not eternally keep the same posture.

How could he appear hunchback at noon when he had been straight at ten o'clock? what pretext could he give a friend who suddenly saw him change his features because, while walking with him, he chanced to meet a suspicious face?

Robert Briquet, therefore, led the life of a recluse; moreover, it suited his taste; his whole diversion consisted in going to see Gorenflot, and in finishing with him the famous wine of 1550, which the worthy prior had taken care not to leave in the cellars of Beaune. But ordinary minds, like great minds, are subject to change; Gorenflot changed, though not physically.

He now saw subservient to his power and discretion the one who until then had held his destiny in his hands.

Chicot, coming to dine at the priory, seemed to him an enslaved Chicot, and Gorenflot from that moment thought too much of himself, and not enough of Chicot.

Chicot saw without offence the change in his friend; those whom he had met with near King Henry had made him grow accustomed to that sort of philosophy.

He was more careful; that was all.

Instead of going every day to the priory, he went only once a week, then every fortnight, then, finally, every month.

Gorenflot was so puffed up that he did not notice this.

Chicot was too much of a philosopher to be sensitive; he laughed in his sleeve at the ingratitude of Gorenflot and scratched his nose and chin, according to his habit.

"Water and time," said he, "are the two most powerful dissolvents that I know; the one destroys stone, the other self-love. Let us wait."

And he waited.

He was in this waiting state when the events we have just described took place, in the midst of which there seemed to arise some of those new elements which presage great political catastrophes.

But as his King, whom he, although dead to the world, still loved, seemed to him in the midst of coming events to run some dangers similar to those from which he had already preserved him, he took upon himself to appear before him as a spirit, with the sole object of foretelling the future to him.

We have seen how the announcement of the coming arrival of Monsieur de Mayenne, an announcement involved in the sending away of Joyeuse, and which Chicot with the intelligence of a monkey had sought out in its obscurity, had brought Chicot from the spirit state to that of a living man, and from the position of prophet to that of ambassador.

Now that everything which might have appeared obscure in our story is explained, we will return, if our readers are willing, to Chicot, as he set out from the Louvre, and will follow him to his little house at the Bussy cross-roads.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SERENADE.

To go from the Louvre to his house, Chicot had not far to walk.

He descended the steep bank of the river, and began to cross the Seine in a small boat, which he rowed himself, and which he had brought from the shores of Nesle and fastened to the deserted quay of the Louvre.

"It is strange," said he, as he rowed, watching the windows of the palace, one of which, that of the King's chamber, still remained lighted, in spite of the late hour of the night, "it is strange, after so many years, that Henry is just the same. Some have risen, others have fallen; some have died; he has gained a few wrinkles on his face, and in his heart, that is all; he has still the same mind, feeble and strong, whimsical and poetic; still the same selfish soul, ever demanding more than one can give; friendship for indifference, love for friendship, devotion for love, and with all that, more unhappy, more

wretched, more melancholy than any other man in his kingdom. There is, in truth, no one but myself, I believe, who understands this singular mixture of debauchery and repentance, impiety and superstition, no one but myself who knows the Louvre, through the corridors of which so many favorites have passed to the tomb, to exile or oblivion; no one but myself who can safely handle and play with that crown which burns the thought of so many, before it burns their fingers."

Chicot heaved a sigh more philosophical than sad, and bent vigorously to his oars.

"By the way," said he, suddenly, "the King did not speak to me of money for the journey; this confidence honors me in that it proves I am still his friend."

Chicot began to laugh silently, as was his habit; then, with a last stroke of the oars, he brought his boat upon the sand, where it remained. Making fast the prow to a stake by means of a knot, of which he held the secret, and which, in those innocent times (we speak by comparison), was a sufficient safeguard, he set out for his home, situated, as has been said, scarcely two gunshots from the river bank.

Upon entering the Rue des Augustins, he was attracted and greatly surprised to hear the sound of instruments and voices which filled with music the quarter, usually so quiet at this late hour.

"So! some one is getting married?" thought he at first; "*ventre de biche!* I had only five hours for sleep, and now I shall be obliged to stay awake, I, who am not getting married."

As he drew near, he saw a great light reflected upon the windows of the few houses along the street. It was caused by a dozen torches held by pages and footmen, while twenty-four musicians under the direction of an excited Italian were doing their utmost with violins, psalters, cistres, rebecs, bass-viols, trumpets, and drums. This noisy army was arranged in good order before a house which Chicot, not without surprise, recognized as his own.

The invisible general who was directing the manœuvre had placed the musicians and pages so that each face was turned towards the house of Robert Briquet, their eyes fixed on the windows, motionless, living for this contemplation alone.

Chicot stood a moment stupefied, watching all the evolutions, and listening to the racket.

Then striking his thighs with his bony hands:

"Why, there must be some mistake; it is impossible that they are making so much noise for me."

As he drew still nearer, he mingled with the crowd which the serenade had attracted, and, looking carefully around, assured himself that the light of the torches was really reflected on his house, as all the music was centred there; no one in the crowd concerned himself either with the house opposite, or with the neighboring houses.

"In truth," said Chicot to himself, "it is indeed for me; has some unknown princess fallen in love with me, perchance?"

Yet this supposition, flattering as it was, did not seem to convince Chicot.

He turned to the building opposite his own.

The two windows of this house, which looked out from the second story, and which were the only ones without blinds, absorbed at intervals some rays of light; but this was its only pleasure, poor house, which seemed deprived of all light, and robbed of every human face.

"They must sleep soundly there," said Chicot. "*Ventre de biche!* such a bacchanalia would rouse the dead!"

During all these questions and answers which Chicot was putting to himself, the orchestra continued its symphonies as though it were playing before an assembly of kings and emperors.

"Pardon me, my friend," then said Chicot, addressing a torch-bearer, "but can you tell me, please, for whom all this music is intended."

"For the bourgeois who lives over there," replied the man, pointing to the house of Robert Briquet.

"For me," said Chicot, "evidently it is for me."

He made his way through the crowd to read the answer to the enigma on the sleeves and breasts of the pages, but each coat of arms was carefully hidden beneath a grayish tabard.

"To whom do you belong, my friend?" demanded Chicot of a drummer who, having nothing to play at that moment, was warming his fingers with his breath.

"To the bourgeois who lives here," replied the musician, pointing with his stick to the house of Robert Briquet.

"Ah! ah!" said Chicot, "not only are they here for me,

but still more, they belong to me. Better and better; well, we shall see."

Arming his face with the most complicated grimace he could muster, he elbowed his way right and left among pages, lackeys, and musicians, and finally reached the door of his house, a manœuvre which he accomplished not without difficulty, and then, visible and resplendent in the circle formed by the torch-bearers, he drew his key from his pocket, opened the door, entered it, and closed and locked it. Ascending to the balcony, he brought out a leather chair, settled himself comfortably in it, and leaned his chin on the railing, without appearing to notice the laughter which greeted his appearance.

"Gentlemen," said he, "are you not making a mistake? Are your trills, cadences, and runs really for me?"

"You are Maître Robert Briquet?" demanded the director of the orchestra.

"In person."

"Well, we are entirely at your service, monsieur," replied the Italian, with a movement of his bâton which brought forth a fresh burst of melody.

"It is very strange," said Chicot to himself, letting his sharp eyes wander over the crowd and the neighboring houses.

All the inhabitants of the houses were at the windows, on the thresholds, or mingling with the groups in front of the door.

Maître Fournichon, his wife, and all the retinue of the Forty-Five — women, children, and lackeys — filled the doors and windows of *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier.*

The opposite house alone was dark, silent as a tomb.

Chicot still sought to discover with his eyes the answer to this undecipherable enigma, when all at once he thought he saw, beneath the awning of his house, between the cracks of the floor of the balcony, slightly below his feet, a man closely wrapped in a dark-colored cloak, wearing a black hat, with a red plume, and a long sword. The man evidently thought he was out of sight, and was gazing with his whole soul at the house opposite, deserted, silent, dead.

From time to time the leader of the orchestra left his post, and spoke in a low tone to this man.

Chicot quickly guessed that the whole interest of the scene lay there, and that this black hat hid the face of a gentleman. Henceforth his whole attention was riveted on this person; the

rôle of observer was easy to him, his position on the railing of the balcony making it easy for him to look into the street and under the awning; he succeeded, therefore, in following every movement of the mysterious stranger, whose first imprudent move could not fail to reveal his features to him.

Suddenly, while Chicot was wholly absorbed in his observations, a cavalier, followed by two equerries, appeared at the corner of the street, and with blows of his switch energetically drove away the crowd which was bent on gazing at the musicians.

"Monsieur Joyeuse!" murmured Chicot, who recognized the cavalier as the Grand Admiral of France, booted and spurred by order of the King. The crowd dispersed; the orchestra stopped playing.

Probably a sign from the leader had imposed silence on it.

The cavalier approached the gentleman hidden under the awning.

"Well, Henry," said he, "anything new?"

"Nothing, brother, nothing."

"Nothing!"

"No. She has not even appeared."

"Have not the fellows made an uproar then?"

"They have deafened the whole quarter."

"Did they not cry out, then, as they were told to do, that they were playing in honor of this bourgeois?"

"They shouted it out so loud that he is there in person, on his balcony, listening to the serenade."

"And has she not appeared?"

"Neither she nor any one else."

"The idea was clever, though," said Joyeuse, disappointed; "for, without compromising herself, she could have done what all these good people did, and profited by the music given to her neighbor."

Henry shook his head.

"Ah! it is easy to see that you do not know her, brother," said he.

"Yes, yes, I know her; that is to say, I know all women, and as she is one of the number, well, let us not be discouraged."

"Oh! my God! brother, you say that in a hopeless tone."

"Not in the least; only from to-day on, this bourgeois must be serenaded every evening."

"But she will move away!"

"Why, if you say nothing, if you do not point her out, if you always keep hidden? Did the bourgeois speak when this compliment was paid him?"

"He harangued the orchestra. But, look, brother! he is going to speak again."

In fact, Briquet, determined to sift out the matter, had risen to question the leader of the orchestra a second time.

"Keep still, up there, and go into the house," cried Anne, crossly; "the devil! since you have had your serenade, you have nothing to say; so keep quiet."

"My serenade, my serenade," replied Chicot, in the most gracious manner; "but I want to know to whom my serenade is given."

"To your daughter, imbecile!"

"Pardon, monsieur, but I have no daughter."

"To your wife, then."

"Thank God I am not married!"

"Well, to yourself, then, to you personally."

"Yes, to you, and if you do not go in" —

Joyeuse, suiting the action to the words, spurred his horse through the midst of the players toward Chicot's balcony.

"*Ventre de biche!*" cried Chicot, "if the music is for me, who comes to destroy my music?"

"Old fool!" growled Joyeuse, raising his head, "if you do not hide your hideous face in your crow's nest. the musicians will break their instruments over your head."

"Let the poor man alone, brother," said Du Bouchage; "the fact is that he must be greatly surprised."

"And why should he be surprised, by Heaven! Besides, you see well enough that by starting a quarrel we shall bring some one to the window; so let us give the bourgeois a thrashing, let us burn down his house, if necessary, but by Heaven! let us make a commotion, let us make a commotion!"

"For pity's sake, brother," said Henry, "let us not extort the attention of this woman; we are vanquished, so let us resign ourselves."

Briquet had not lost a word of the above conversation, which had thrown much light upon his hitherto confused ideas; he therefore made his mental preparations for defence, knowing the humor of the one who had attacked him. But Joyeuse, yielding to Henry's judgment, no longer persisted; he dismissed pages, valets, musicians, and leader.

Then drawing his brother aside:

"I am in despair," said he; "everything conspires against us."

"What do you mean?"

"Time fails me in which to help you."

"In fact, you are dressed for travelling; I had not noticed it before."

"I start to-night for Antwerp on a mission for the King."

"When did he give it to you?"

"This evening!"

"My God!"

"Come with me, I beg you!"

Henry let his arms drop.

"Do you command me to do so, brother?" said he, growing pale at the idea of leaving.

Anne made a movement.

"If you command it," continued Henry, "I will obey."

"I implore you, Du Bouchage. Nothing more."

"Thank you, brother."

Joyeuse shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will, Joyeuse; but, you see, if I had to give up spending the nights in this street, if I had to stop gazing at that window" —

"Well?"

"I should die!"

"Poor fool!"

"My heart is there, you see, brother," said Henry, raising his hand toward the house, "my life is there; do not ask me to live, if you wrench my heart from my breast."

The duke folded his arms in anger and pity, bit his fine mustache, and pondered a few moments in silence.

"If your father were to beg you, Henry," said he, "to let yourself be cared for by Miron, who is a philosopher as well as physician" —

"I should answer our father that I am not ill, that my head is sound, and that Miron cannot cure love-sickness."

"Well, we must adopt your way of looking at it, Henry; but why should I trouble myself? This woman is a woman, you are persevering; nothing, therefore, is hopeless, and on my return I shall see you more cheerful, more happy, and more merry than I myself."

"Yes, yes, my good brother," replied the young man, press-

ing the hands of his brother; "yes, I shall get better; yes, I shall be happy; thank you for your friendship; thank you! it is my most precious gift."

"After your love."

"Before my life."

Joyeuse, deeply touched in spite of his apparent frivolity, suddenly interrupted his brother.

"Shall we go?" said he; "the torches are out, the instruments on the backs of the musicians, the pages already starting."

"Go, go, brother; I will follow you," said Du Bouchage, sighing to leave the street.

"I understand you," said Joyeuse; "the last adieu before the window. That is right. Well, say adieu for me also, Henry."

Henry passed his arm around the neck of his brother, who leaned forward to embrace him.

"No," said he; "I will accompany you as far as the gates; only wait for me a hundred feet off. Believing the street deserted, perhaps she will show herself."

Anne rode toward the escort waiting a hundred feet away.

"Well," said he, "we have no further need of you until further orders; go."

The torches disappeared, the conversation of the musicians and the laughter of the pages died away, as well as the last groans drawn from the strings of the violins and lutes by the light touch of a wandering hand.

Henry gave a last look at the house, breathed a last prayer to the windows, and slowly and with continual backward glances joined his brother, who was preceded by the two equerries.

Seeing the two young men depart with the musicians, Robert Briquet supposed that the explanation of the scene, if indeed the scene was to have an explanation, was about to take place.

Consequently he withdrew noisily from the balcony and closed the window.

A few curious ones still remained obstinately at their post; but at the end of ten minutes the most persevering had disappeared. In the meantime Robert Briquet had reached the roof of his house, which was indented like that of Flemish

houses, and hiding himself behind one of these projections, he watched the windows opposite.

As soon as the noise had ceased in the street, when neither instruments nor footsteps nor voice could be heard any longer; as soon, in short, as everything had returned to its usual quiet, one of the upper windows of this strange house opened mysteriously and a head was cautiously thrust out.

"Nothing more," murmured a man's voice, "consequently no further danger; it was some mystification intended for our neighbor; you can leave your hiding-place, madam, and come down."

With these words the man closed the window, struck a spark with a piece of flint, and lighted a lamp, which he held out toward a hand extended to receive it.

Chicot looked as hard as he could. But no sooner did he perceive the pale, noble face of the woman who took the lamp, no sooner did he catch the sweet, sad look which was exchanged between servant and mistress, than he himself grew pale, and felt a cold shudder run through his veins.

The young woman, who was scarcely twenty-four years of age, descended the staircase, followed by her servant.

"Ah!" murmured Chicot, passing his hand across his brow to wipe away the perspiration, and as though striving at the same time to dispel some terrible vision, "Ah! Count du Bouchage, brave, beautiful, young man, madly in love, you spoke now of being happy, glad, and merry; pass your motto over to your brother, for nevermore will you say *hilariter*.[1]"

Then he descended to his room, his brow as gloomy as though he had been through some horrible pass, some bloody abyss, and sat down in the darkness, himself conquered, the last, but perhaps the most completely, by the incredible influence of melancholy which came from the heart of that house.

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[1] *Joyously*, the motto of Henry de Joyeuse, we have already said, was the Latin word *hilariter*.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHICOT'S PURSE.

CHICOT passed the whole night dreaming in his armchair.

Dreaming is the word, for, in truth, they were less thoughts than dreams that occupied him.

To return to the past, to see growing clear by the light of a single glance a whole epoch already almost effaced from memory, is not thinking.

All night Chicot lived in a world already left long behind him, and peopled with illustrious or graceful shades which the eyes of the pale woman, like a faithful lamp, reflected, and which glided before him, one by one, with his cortège of happy or unhappy memories.

Chicot, who had so greatly regretted his sleep on his way back from the Louvre, did not even now think of going to bed. But, when the dawn began to silver the windows of his room:

"The hour of the spirits is passed," said he, "it is necessary to think a little of the living."

He rose, girt on his long sword, threw over his shoulders a woollen cloak of dark wine color, of a texture impervious to the heaviest rains, and with the stoic firmness of a sage examined at a glance the depths of his purse and the soles of his shoes.

The latter appeared to Chicot worthy to begin a campaign; the former deserved particular attention.

We shall, therefore, make a halt in our story, in order to take time to describe it to our readers.

Chicot, a man of vivid imagination, as every one knows, had bored a hole which extended through the main beam of his house from end to end, with a diameter of eighteen inches. This beam was painted in various colors, thus serving for ornamentation as well as for solidity and use.

In this beam he had placed a chest a foot and a half long by six inches wide, which contained a thousand crowns in gold.

Now this is the calculation which Chicot made:

"I spend," he said, "every day, the twentieth part of one of these crowns; I have therefore the wherewithal to live twenty thousand days. I shall never live them, but I may reach the half, and then the older I grow, the more my needs, and con-

sequently my expenses will increase, for comfort increases in proportion to the diminution of life. All this gives me twenty-five or thirty good years to live. Well, thank God! that is fully enough."

Thus Chicot, by his calculation, found himself one of the richest gentlemen in the city of Paris, and this ease as to his future gave him a certain pride.

Not that Chicot was avaricious; for a long time, indeed, he had been prodigal, but poverty inspired him with horror, for he knew that it falls on the shoulders like a leaden cloak, and that it bows down the strongest.

Therefore, as he opened his chest to make out his account with himself, he said:

"*Ventre de biche!* the century is hard, and the times are not generous. I need have no scruples with Henry. These thousand crowns of gold do not even come from him, but from a bachelor uncle who promised me six times as much. If it were still night, I would take a hundred crowns out of the King's pocket; but it is daylight, and I have no one on whom I can depend except myself and Gorenflot."

This idea of drawing money from Gorenflot made his worthy friend smile.

"It would look fine," he continued, "if Maître Gorenflot, who owes me his fortune, should refuse to give his friend a hundred crowns for the service of the King who has appointed him prior of the Jacobins.

"Ah!" he continued, throwing back his head, "he is no longer Gorenflot.

"Yes, but Robert Briquet is still Chicot. But this letter of the King, this famous epistle intended to set the court of Navarre on fire, I should have gone for it before daybreak and here it is already dawn. Bah! I must succeed in this attempt, and if Gorenflot is not easy to persuade I will beat it into his brain. However, let me start!"

Chicot put back the plank which concealed his hiding-place, secured it with four nails, covered it with the slab, on which he scattered the dust necessary to stop up the joints, then, ready to set out, he gave a last look around the little room in which, for so many happy days, he had been as safe and as unapproachable as the heart in his breast.

He glanced at the house opposite.

"Now," said he to himself, "in order to bring the invisible

lady to her window for an instant these Joyeuse devils may some fine night set fire to my house. Well! well! but if they burn my house they will make an ingot of my thousand crowns at the same time! In truth, I think that I would be wise to bury the money. And yet, if the Joyeuses burn my house, the King will pay me for it."

Thus reassured, Chicot closed his door, the key of which he took away with him; then, as he set out toward the river bank:

"Well! well!" said he, "finding my absence suspicious, this Nicholas Poulain may very likely come here, and — Ah! but this morning I have only the ideas of a hare. Let me away, away!"

As Chicot closed the street door no less carefully than he had shut the door of his room, he perceived at the opposite window the servant of the unknown lady taking the air, hoping, no doubt, so early in the morning, to be unnoticed.

This man, as we have already said, was completely disfigured by a wound on his left temple, which extended across a part of his cheek.

One of his eyebrows, moreover, displaced by the violence of the blow, almost completely concealed his left eye, sunk deep in its socket. Strange fact! with his bald head, and grayish beard, he had sharp eyes, and the freshness of youth glowed on the cheek which had been spared.

At sight of Robert Briquet, who was descending the steps from his door, he covered his head with his hood and made a movement as if to draw back, but Chicot signed to him to wait.

"Neighbor!" cried Chicot, "the hubbub of last night has disgusted me with my house; I am going for a few weeks to my farm; would you be kind enough, from time to time, to give a look in this direction."

"Yes, monsieur," replied the stranger, "very gladly."

"And if you should see robbers" —

"I have a good musket, monsieur; be easy."

"Thank you. However, I have another favor to ask of you, neighbor."

"Speak, I am listening to you."

Chicot seemed to measure with his eye the distance which separated him from the man.

"It is rather a delicate affair to shout out to you at such a distance, dear neighbor," said he.

"In that case I will come down," replied the unknown man.

Chicot saw him disappear, and, as he had drawn nearer to the house, he heard the man's steps approaching, then the door opened, and they found themselves face to face.

This time the servant was completely hidden in his hood.

"It is very cold, this morning," said he, to hide or excuse his mysterious precaution.

"An icy wind, neighbor," replied Chicot, pretending not to notice the speaker, in order to put him at ease.

"I am listening to you, monsieur."

"Well," said Chicot, "I am leaving home."

"You have already done me the honor to say so."

"I remember perfectly; but I am leaving some money in my house."

"So much the worse, monsieur, so much the worse! Take it away with you."

"No; a man is heavier and less resolute when he seeks to save his purse at the same time as his life. Therefore I am leaving the money here; well hidden, however, in fact so well hidden that I fear only the chance of fire. If that should happen, would you, as my neighbor, be kind enough to watch the burning of a certain thick beam, the end of which you see yonder, on the right, cut in the shape of a water-shoot; watch, I say, and search among the ashes?"

"Really, monsieur," said the stranger, with a visible hesitation, "you trouble me greatly. This confidence would better be given to a friend than to a man you do not know, whom you could not know."

As he uttered these words his bright eye questioned the insipid grimace of Chicot.

"It is true," replied the latter, "I do not know you; but I have great faith in faces, and I think yours is that of an honest man."

"But see, monsieur, the responsibility you put on me. It may be that all this music will weary my mistress as it has wearied you, and that we shall move away."

"Well," replied Chicot, "then everything is said, and I shall not blame you, neighbor."

"Thank you for the confidence you put in a poor stranger," said the servant, bowing. "I shall try to show myself worthy of it."

And again bowing to Chicot, he withdrew into his house.

Chicot, on his part, bowed kindly to him; then, seeing the door closed on him:

"Poor young man!" he murmured; "he is this time a real phantom; yet I have seen him so gay, so lively, so handsome!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PRIORY OF THE JACOBINS.

The priory which the King had given to Gorenflot, in order to recompense him for his loyal services, and especially for his brilliant eloquence, was situated about two gunshots beyond the Porte Saint Antoine.

The quarter of the Porte Saint Antoine was much frequented by the aristocracy, the King making numerous visits to the Château of Vincennes, which at this time was still called the forest of Vincennes.

Here and there along the route to the castle some small homes of great lords, with charming gardens and magnificent courts, were a sort of extension to the château, and a goodly number of rendezvous were held there, from which (in spite of the craze which at that time the smallest bourgeois had for concerning himself with affairs of state) we venture to say politics were carefully excluded. The result of this going to and coming from the court was that, other things being equal, the road was as important at that time as is the Champs Elysées to-day.

It was, one will admit, a fine site for the priory, which rose proudly on the right of the road from Vincennes.

This priory consisted of a quadrilateral of buildings, enclosing an enormous court planted with trees, a kitchen garden situated behind the buildings, and a number of smaller houses, which made the priory look as large as a village.

Two hundred monks occupied the dormitories situated at the rear of the court, parallel with the road.

In front, four large windows, opening upon an iron balcony, gave to the apartments of the priory air, light, and life.

Resembling a city which one fears might be besieged, the priory possessed in itself all the resources of the tributary territories of Charonne, Montreuil, and Saint Mandé. Its pastures

fattened a herd, always full, of fifty oxen and ninety-nine sheep; religious orders, either by traditional or by written law, could not possess a hundred of anything.

A private building also sheltered ninety-nine pigs, of a particular breed, which were raised with love and great pride by a pork-butcher chosen by Dom Modeste himself. To this honorable choice, the pork-butcher was indebted for the exquisite sausages, the stuffed ears, and the chive puddings with which he once supplied the inn of the *Corne d'Abondance.*

Dom Modeste, acknowledging the fine repasts which he had formerly had at Maître Bonhomet's, thus paid the debts of Brother Gorenflot.

It is useless to speak of the dependencies of the kitchen and the cellar. The fruit-wall of the priory, facing the south-east, produced incomparable peaches, apricots, and plums. Moreover, preserves of these fruits, and sugared pastry, were made by a certain Brother Eusèbe, author of the famous rock of confitures which the Hôtel de Ville of Paris offered to the two queens at the last state banquet given there. As to the cellar, Gorenflot had stocked it himself by emptying all those in Burgundy; for he had the innate predilection of all real wine-drinkers, who, in general, claim that the wine of Burgundy is the only true wine.

It is in the heart of this priory, a veritable paradise for idlers and gourmands, in a sumptuous apartment on the first floor, the balcony of which looked out upon the highway, that we are about to find Gorenflot, ornamented with one more chin, and showing that kind of venerable gravity which the constant habit of repose and comfort gives to the most ordinary faces.

In his robe, white as snow, with his black collar, which warmed his broad shoulders, Gorenflot no longer had the liberty of movement which he had in his gray robe of simple monk, but he had more dignity.

His hand, thick as a shoulder of mutton, rested on a quarto, which it completely covered; his large feet were almost demolishing a stove; and his arms had not length enough to encircle his body. Half-past seven in the morning had just struck.

The prior had been the last to rise, having taken advantage of the rule which gives to the head monk one more hour of sleep than to the other monks; but he was calmly prolonging his night in a deep armchair as soft as eider-down.

The furniture of the room in which the worthy abbé was sleeping was more worldly than religious; a table with twisted feet, and covered with a rich cloth, pictures of gallant religion, singular mixture of love and devotion, found only in the art of that epoch; on the dressing-stands precious vases for the church or the table; at the windows heavy curtains of Venetian brocade, more splendid, in spite of their age, than the most costly new stuffs, — such, in detail, was the wealth of which Dom Modeste Gorenflot had become possessor, and this by the grace of God, of the King, and especially of Chicot.

Thus the prior was sleeping in his armchair while the day came to make him her usual visit, and caressed with her silver beams the purplish and pearl-colored hues of the sleeper's face.

The door of the room opened softly, and two monks entered without awaking the prior. The first was a man of thirty or thirty-five, thin and pale, moving about nervously in his Jacobin robe; he carried his head high; his eyes, sharp as those of a falcon, commanded even before he spoke, and yet their glance was softened by the play of long white eyelids, which, when closed, set off the wide dark circle under his eyes. But when this black eye shone between its thick eyebrows and the tawny frame of the socket, one would have said it was the lightning flashing from the folds of two copper-colored clouds. This monk was called Brother Borromée; he had been treasurer of the convent for the past three weeks.

The other was a young man of seventeen or eighteen, short, but well formed, with bright black eyes, a fearless look, and a prominent chin. He had rolled back his wide sleeves, thus exposing with a sort of pride two nervous arms, quick to gesticulate.

"The prior still sleeps, Brother Borromée," said the younger of the two monks to the other. "Shall we waken him?"

"Let us take care not to, Brother Jacques," replied the treasurer.

"Really, it is a pity to have a prior who sleeps so long," went on the young brother, "for we could have tried the arms this morning. Did you notice what beautiful cuirasses and what fine muskets there are among them?"

"Silence, brother! You will be heard."

"How unfortunate!" continued the little monk, stamping his foot, the sound of which was deadened by the thick carpet.

"How unfortunate! It is so clear to-day; the court is so dry! What beautiful exercise we could have, brother treasurer!"

"We must wait, my child," said Brother Borromée, with feigned submission, which was contradicted by the fire in his eyes.

"But why do you not order them to distribute the arms?" asked Jacques impetuously, pushing up his fallen sleeves.

"I order?"

"Yes, you."

"I do not order; you know that very well, brother," replied Borromée, with compunction. "Is not the master here?"

"In that armchair, — asleep, — when every one is awake," said Jacques, in a tone less respectful than impatient, — "the master!" And a glance of superb intelligence seemed as if it would penetrate to the very heart of Brother Borromée.

"Let us respect his rank and his sleep," said the latter, advancing to the centre of the room, but so awkwardly that he overturned a stool.

Although the carpet lessened the noise of the stool, as it had deadened that of Brother Jacques' heel, Dom Modeste started at the sound, and awoke.

"Who is there?" he cried, in the trembling voice of a sleeping sentinel.

"Lord prior," said Brother Borromée, "pardon if we disturb your pious meditation, but I come to take your orders."

"Ah! good morning, Brother Borromée," said Gorenflot, with a slight nod of his head.

Then, after a moment's reflection, during which it was evident that he had stretched all the cords of his memory:

"What orders?" said he, blinking his eyes three or four times.

"In regard to the arms and armor."

"The arms? and armor?" said Gorenflot.

"Without doubt. Your lordship ordered arms and armor to be brought."

"To whom did I give the order?"

"To me."

"To you? — I ordered arms, I?"

"Without a doubt, lord prior," said Borromée in a steady, firm voice.

"I?" repeated Dom Modeste in great surprise. "I? and when?"

"A week ago."

"Ah! if it was a week ago — But why arms?"

"You told me, my lord, — and I will repeat your very words, — you said to me: 'Brother Borromée, it would be well to procure arms for the monks and brethren; gymnastic exercises develop the strength of the body as pious exhortations develop that of the soul."

"I said that?" said Gorenflot.

"Yes, reverend prior; and I, an unworthy but obedient brother, hastened to carry out your orders, and have procured arms."

"That is very strange," murmured Gorenflot, "but I remember nothing at all about it."

"You even added, reverend prior, this Latin saying: *Militat spiritu, militat gladio.*"

"Oh!" cried Dom Modeste, opening wide his eyes, "I added that?"

"I have a faithful memory, reverend prior," replied Borromée, modestly lowering his eyes.

"If I said so," continued Gorenflot, shaking his head gently, "it is because I had my reasons for saying so, Brother Borromée. In fact it always has been my opinion that it is necessary to exercise the body; and when I was a simple monk I fought with the word as well as with the sword. *Militat — spiritu —* very well, Brother Borromée; it was an inspiration from the Lord."

"I will go, then, and finish carrying out your orders, reverend prior," said Borromée, withdrawing with Brother Jacques, who, trembling with joy, drew him on by the hem of his gown.

"Go," said Gorenflot with dignity.

"Ah! lord prior," said Brother Borromée, returning a few seconds after his departure, "I forgot"—

"What?"

"There is a friend of your lordship in the parlor, who asks to speak with you."

"What is his name?"

"Maître Robert Briquet."

"Maître Robert Briquet," said Gorenflot, "he is not a friend, Brother Borromée, only a simple acquaintance."

"Then your reverence will not receive him?"

"Oh! yes," said Gorenflot, carelessly, "the man amuses me; let him come up."

Brother Borromée bowed a second time and withdrew. As to Brother Jacques, he made but one bound from the apartment of the prior to the room in which the arms were stored. Five minutes later the door again opened, and Chicot appeared.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

Dom Modeste did not change the sanctimoniously inclined position which he had assumed. Chicot crossed the room to reach him.

The prior merely bent his head gently to indicate to the newcomer that he saw him.

Chicot did not for a single instant appear surprised at the indifference of the prior; he continued to advance, and, when he had reached a respectful distance, he bowed.

"Good morning, Monsieur le Prior," said he.

"Ah! you here?" said Gorenflot; "you have come back to life, it seems?"

"Did you think me dead, Monsieur le Prior?"

"Well! you were no longer to be seen."

"I had business on hand."

"Ah!"

Chicot knew that unless warmed by two or three bottles of old Burgundy Gorenflot was sparing of words. But as, in all probability, considering the early hour of the morning, Gorenflot had not yet breakfasted, he took an easy-chair, and settled himself in silence in the chimney-corner, stretching his feet towards the fire-dogs and leaning his back against the soft chair.

"Will you breakfast with me, Monsieur Briquet?" demanded Dom Modeste.

"Perhaps, lord prior."

"You must not be vexed with me, Monsieur Briquet, if it is not possible for me to give you all the time you wish."

"Well, who the devil is asking you for your time, Monsieur le Prior? *Ventre de biche!* I did not even ask to breakfast with you; it was you who made the suggestion."

"Assuredly, Monsieur Briquet," said Dom Modeste, with a

restlessness which the very firm tone of Chicot justified; "yes, without doubt, I made the suggestion, but" —

"But you thought that I would not accept."

"Oh, no! Is it my habit to be crafty, Monsieur Briquet?"

"One adopts any habit one wishes, when one is a man of your superiority, Monsieur le Prior," replied Chicot, with one of those smiles which belonged only to him.

Dom Modeste looked at Chicot and blinked his eyes.

It was impossible to guess whether Chicot was making fun of him or speaking seriously. Chicot arose.

"Why do you rise, Monsieur Briquet?" demanded Gorenflot.

"Because I am going away."

"And why are you going? You said you would breakfast with me?"

"I did not say that I would breakfast with you, in the first place."

"Pardon me; I asked you."

"And I answered 'perhaps.' 'Perhaps' does not mean 'yes.'"

"You are angry?"

Chicot began to laugh.

"I angry!" said he, "why should I be angry? Because you are impudent, ignorant, and boorish? Oh, dear lord prior, I have known you too long a time to get angry at your little faults."

Gorenflot, amazed at this artless sally of his guest, sat with open mouth and arms extended.

"Adieu, Monsieur le Prior," continued Chicot.

"Oh, do not go."

"My journey cannot be postponed."

"You are going on a journey?"

"I have a mission."

"From whom?"

"From the King."

Gorenflot fell from abyss to abyss.

"A mission," said he; "a mission from the King! You have seen him, then?"

"Without doubt."

"And how did he receive you?"

"With enthusiasm; he has a memory, King though he is."

"A mission from the King," murmured Gorenflot; "and I impudent, I ignorant, I rude" —

His heart collapsed, like a balloon which loses its wind from the prick of a needle.

"Adieu!" repeated Chicot.

Gorenflot raised himself in his armchair, and, with his large hand, detained the ambassador, who, we must admit, let himself easily be brought back.

"Come, let us understand each other," said the prior.

"In what respect?" asked Chicot.

"As to your sensitiveness to-day."

"I? I am the same to-day as I always am."

"No."

"Simply a mirror of the people I am with."

"No."

"You laugh, I laugh; you sulk, I make a grimace."

"No, no, no!"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Well, come, I admit it; I was preoccupied."

"Indeed!"

"Will you not be indulgent to a man who is a victim of such hard work? Have I my own head, my God? Is not this priory like a government of a province? Remember that I command two hundred men, that I am at once economist, architect, intendant; all this without counting my spiritual duties."

"Oh, it is indeed too much for an unworthy servant of God!"

"You are ironical!" said Gorenflot; "Monsieur Briquet, have you lost your Christian charity?"

"I had some, then?"

"I believe, too, that there is some envy in your case; take care, envy is a capital offence."

"Envy in my case? And what should I envy? Tell me."

"Humph! you say to yourself: 'the Prior Dom Modeste Gorenflot is rising step by step, he is on the ascending road'" —

"While as to me, I am on the descending road, am I not?" replied Chicot, ironically.

"It is the fault of your false position, Monsieur Briquet."

"Monsieur le Prior, remember the words of the Gospel."

"What words?"

"'He who exalteth himself shall be humbled, but he who humbleth himself shall be exalted.'"

"Pooh!" said Gorenflot.

"Well, there you are doubting the Scriptures, heretic!" cried Chicot, clasping his hands.

"Heretic!" repeated Gorenflot; "the Huguenots are heretics."

"Schismatic, then!"

"Come, what do you mean, Monsieur Briquet? In truth, you confuse me."

"Nothing, except that I am starting on a journey, and that I have come to say good-by. So, adieu, my lord Dom Modeste!"

"You are not going to leave me in this way?"

"Yes, certainly."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"A friend?"

"When one is great one no longer has friends."

"You, Chicot?"

"I am no longer Chicot; you reproached me with it a few minutes ago."

"I? When?"

"When you spoke of my false position?"

"Reproached you! Ah! What words you use to-day!"

And the prior lowered his large head, whose three chins flattened into a single one against his bull-like throat.

Chicot watched him from the corner of his eye, and saw him grow slightly pale.

"Adieu, and without bitterness for the truths I have told you."

He rose as if to go.

"Tell me anything you will, Monsieur Chicot," said Dom Modeste; "but do not look at me like that again!"

"Ah! ah! It is a little late."

"Never too late! But wait! one cannot leave without eating — the devil! it is not healthful; you have told me so twenty times yourself! So let us breakfast."

Chicot had determined to find fault with all his advantages at once.

"Faith, no!" said he; "the eating is too poor here."

Gorenflot had withstood the other attacks with courage; he succumbed under this.

"The eating is poor in my house?" he murmured, aghast.

"In my opinion, at least," said Chicot.

"You had something to complain of at your last dinner?"

"I have still the atrocious taste in my mouth; faugh!"

"You said 'faugh'!" cried Gorenflot, raising his arms to heaven.

"Yes," said Chicot, resolutely, "I said 'faugh'!"

"But why? Speak!"

"The pork cutlets were shamefully burned."

"Oh!"

"The stuffed ears did not crack between the teeth."

"Oh!"

"The rice capons tasted only of water."

"Good heavens!"

"The soup was not without grease."

"Mercy!"

"There was oil on the gravy which still swims in my stomach."

"Chicot! Chicot!" sighed Dom Modeste, in the same tone that the dying Cæsar said to his assassin, "Brutus! Brutus!"

"And then, you have no time to give me."

"I?"

"You told me you were busy; did you not, yes or no? It only remains for you to call me a liar."

"Well, we can postpone this business. It is a lady who asks to see me; that is all."

"Receive her, then."

"No, no, dear Monsieur Chicot, although she has sent me one hundred bottles of Sicilian wine."

"One hundred bottles of Sicilian wine?"

"I will not receive her, although probably she is a very great lady; I will not receive her; I wish to receive only you, dear Monsieur Chicot. She wanted to become my penitent, this great lady, and sends bottles of Sicilian wine by the hundred. Well, if you demand it, I will refuse her my spiritual advice; I will tell her to find another confessor."

"You will do all this?"

"In order to breakfast with you, dear Monsieur Chicot! to make up for my injuries to you."

"Your injuries come from your fierce pride, Dom Modeste."

"I will humble myself, my friend."

"For your indolent idleness."

"Chicot! Chicot! From to-morrow I will mortify myself by giving my monks exercise every day."

"Your monks, exercise?" said Chicot, opening his eyes; "and what exercise? That of the fork?"

"No; that of arms."

"The exercise of arms?"

"Yes; and yet it is fatiguing to command."

"You command the exercise of the Jacobins?"

"I am going to command it, at least."

"From to-morrow?"

"From to-day, if you ask it."

"And whose idea was it to give exercise to the monks?"

"Mine, apparently," said Gorenflot.

"Yours? Impossible!"

"Yes, I gave the order to Brother Borromée."

"Who is this Brother Borromée?"

"Ah! it is true you do not know him."

"Who is he?"

"He is the treasurer."

"How do you come to have a treasurer whom I do not know, rascal?"

"He arrived since your last visit."

"And whence comes this treasurer?"

"Monsieur le Cardinal de Guise recommended him."

"In person?"

"By letter, dear Monsieur Chicot, by letter."

"Was it that kite-face I saw below?"

"The same."

"Who announced me?"

"Yes."

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot, involuntarily. "And what good qualities has he, this treasurer so warmly recommended by Monsieur le Cardinal de Guise?"

"He keeps accounts like Pythagorus."

"And it is with him that you decided on these exercises of arms?"

"Yes, my friend."

"That is to say, it was he who suggested to you to arm your monks, was it not?"

"No, dear Monsieur Chicot, the idea was mine, entirely mine."

"And for what purpose?"

"For the purpose of arming them."

"No pride, hardened sinner, pride is a capital sin; this idea did not come from you."

"From me or from him; I no longer know whether the idea was his or mine. No, no, decidedly, it was mine; it even appears that on this occasion I uttered a Latin saying, very wise and very brilliant."

Chicot drew near to the prior.

"A Latin saying — you, my dear prior?" said Chicot; "and you remember this Latin saying?"

"*Militat spiritu*" —

"*Militat spiritu, militat gladio?*"

"That 's it! That 's it!" cried Dom Modeste, with enthusiasm.

"Well, well," said Chicot, "it is impossible to excuse oneself with better grace than you do, Dom Modeste; I pardon you."

"Oh!" said Gorenflot, with feeling.

"You are still my friend, my true friend."

Gorenflot wiped away a tear.

"Now let us breakfast, and I will be indulgent to the breakfast."

"Listen," said Gorenflot, with enthusiasm, "I will send word to our brother the cook that if the fare is not royal I will have him put into the dungeon."

"Do so, do so," said Chicot; "you are master, my dear prior."

"And we will uncork some of the penitent's bottles."

"I will aid you with my knowledge, my friend."

"Let me embrace you, Chicot!"

"Don't choke me, but let us talk."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GUESTS.

Gorenflot was not long in giving his orders.

If the worthy prior was indeed on the ascending road, as he pretended, it was especially in regard to that which concerned the details of a repast and the progress of culinary science.

Dom Modeste sent for Brother Eusèbe, who appeared, not before his chief, but before his judge. From the way in which he had been summoned, he guessed that something unusual was about to take place at the reverend prior's.

"Brother Eusèbe," said Gorenflot, severely, "listen to what my friend Monsieur Robert Briquet has to say to you. You are growing careless, it seems. I have heard of grave charges brought against your last bisque, and of a serious neglect in regard to the cracking of your ears. Take care, Brother Eusèbe, take care, a single step in the wrong direction drags down the whole body."

The monk grew red and pale by turns, and stammered some excuse which was not accepted.

"Enough," said Gorenflot.

Brother Eusèbe was silent.

"What have you to-day for breakfast?" asked the reverend prior.

"I have some buttered eggs on cocks' combs."

"Next?"

"Stuffed mushrooms."

"Next?"

"Crawfish in Madeira wine."

"Of small account all that, of small account; something substantial; come, tell us quickly.

"I shall have, in addition, a ham with pistachio nuts."

"Faugh!" said Chicot.

"Pardon me," interrupted Eusèbe, timidly; "it is cooked in champagne, dry. I have larded it with some tender beef pickled in oil from Aix, so that with the fat of the beef you eat the lean of the ham, and with the fat of the ham the lean of the beef."

Gorenflot hazarded a look at Chicot accompanied by a gesture of approval.

"That is good, is it not, Monsieur Robert?" he said.

Chicot made a gesture of partial satisfaction.

"And then," asked Gorenflot, "what have you next?"

"We can cook you an eel in a minute."

"Plague on eels!" said Chicot.

"I think, Monsieur Briquet," said Brother Eusèbe, growing bold by degrees, "I think that you may taste my eels without greatly repenting it."

"Are they something special?"

"I raise them in a particular way."

"Oh! Oh!"

"Yes," added Gorenflot, "it seems that the Romans or the Greeks, I do not know which, but, at any rate, a people of

Italy, raised lampreys as Eusèbe does his eels. He read of it in an ancient author named Suetonius, who has written on cookery."

"What! Brother Eusèbe," exclaimed Chicot, "you give your eels men to eat?"

"No, monsieur, I chop up the intestines and the livers of birds and game, I add a bit of pork, and make this into a kind of sausage meat which I throw to my eels. They live in sweet fresh water, on fine gravel, and in a month grow fat and considerably longer. The one which I shall offer to the lord prior to-day, for instance, weighs nine pounds."

"It is a serpent, then," said Chicot.

"It swallowed a chicken six days old at a mouthful."

"And how have you cooked it?" asked Chicot.

"Yes, how have you cooked it?" repeated the prior.

"I skinned and browned it; strained it in anchovy butter; rolled it in fine bread raspings; then put it on the gridiron again for ten seconds, after which I shall have the honor of serving it, bathed in a sauce of allspice and garlic."

"But the sauce?"

"Yes, the sauce?"

"A simple sauce of oil from Aix, beaten up with citrons and mustard."

"Perfect," said Chicot.

Brother Eusèbe breathed again.

"Now there remains the confectionery," observed Gorenflot, judiciously.

"I will invent some dish that will please the lord prior."

"Well, I leave it to you," said Gorenflot; "show yourself worthy of my confidence."

Eusèbe bowed.

"I may retire, then?" he asked.

The prior looked at Chicot.

"Let him retire."

"Retire, and send our brother the butler to me."

Eusèbe bowed and went out. The butler succeeded Brother Eusèbe and received orders no less definite and no less detailed.

Ten minutes later, the two guests, buried in two great chairs filled with cushions, sat down opposite each other, knife and fork in hand, like two duellists. The table, covered with a fine linen cloth, and large enough for six people, was full,

however, so many were the bottles of various shapes and labels that had been accumulated by the butler.

Eusèbe, faithful to the programme, sent in the fried eggs, the crawfish, and the mushrooms, which filled the air with the gentle odor of truffles, butter as fresh as cream, thyme, and Madeira wine. Chicot set to work like a starved man; the prior, on the contrary, like a man who mistrusts himself, his cook, and his guest.

But after a few moments it was Gorenflot who devoured, while Chicot observed.

They began with Rhine wine, then passed to the Burgundy of 1550; they made an excursion into a hermitage, the date of which they did not know; they touched the Saint Perrey; at last they reached the penitent's wine.

"What do you say to it?" asked Gorenflot, having tasted it three times without venturing an opinion.

"Velvety, but light," said Chicot; "and what is the name of your penitent?"

"I do not know her."

"What! you do not know her name?"

"No, in faith, we carry on our negotiations through an ambassador."

Chicot paused and gently closed his eyes as though to taste a sip of wine which he held in his mouth before swallowing it, but in reality in order to reflect.

"So, then," said he, at the end of five minutes, "it is opposite the general of an army that I have the honor of dining?"

"Oh, my God, yes!"

"What! you sigh in saying that?"

"Ah! it is very fatiguing."

"No doubt, but it is honorable, it is beautiful."

"Superb! but I have no further quiet in the kitchen, and the day before yesterday I was obliged to suppress a dish at supper."

"Suppress a dish? and why?"

"Because several of my best soldiers, I must confess, had the audacity to find the plate of Burgundy preserves which we have every third Friday insufficient."

"The idea! Insufficient! And what reason did they give for this insufficiency?"

"They pretended that they were still hungry, and demanded

some lean meat, like teal, or lobster, or some nice-tasting fish. Do you understand these ravenous eaters ?"

"Well! If they exercise, it is not surprising that they are hungry."

"Wherein then would be the merit ?" said Brother Modeste. "Every one can eat well and work well. The devil! One must offer one's privations to the Lord," continued the worthy abbé, piling a quarter of ham and beef on his fork already respectably supplied with gelatine, of which Brother Eusèbe had not spoken, the dish being too simple, not for serving, but for figuring on the ménu.

"Drink, Modeste, drink," said Chicot; "you will strangle yourself, my dear friend; you are growing crimson."

"It is with indignation," replied the prior, emptying his glass, which contained half a pint.

Chicot let him do so; then when Gorenflot had set down his glass on the table:

"Well," said Chicot, "let us finish your story; it interests me greatly, on my honor! You took a dish from them, then, because they found that they had not enough to eat ?"

"Exactly."

"That was clever."

"But the punishment had a bad effect; I thought that they were going to rebel; their eyes snapped, their teeth chattered."

"They were hungry," said Chicot. "*Ventre de biche!* It was very natural."

"They were hungry, you say ?"

"Without doubt."

"You say so ? You think so ?"

"I am sure of it."

"Well! that evening I noticed a strange fact and one which I shall recommend to the analysis of science; I, therefore, summoned Brother Borromée, giving him my orders about the suppression of this dish, and, seeing the rebellion, I added the suppression of wine."

"Well ?" demanded Chicot.

"Well, to cap the climax, I ordered a new exercise, wishing to overcome the hydra of revolt; the Psalms say that, you know; listen: *Cabis poriabis diagonem.* Ah! you know only that, by Heaven!"

"*Proculcabis draconem,*" said Chicot, filling the prior's glass

"*Draconem*, that 's it; bravo! Àpropos of a dragon, eat some of this eel; it makes your mouth water, it is marvellous!"

"Thanks, I can no longer breathe; but the story, tell me the story."

"What story?"

"Your strange fact."

"Which one? I do not remember."

"The one you were going to recommend to the scientists."

"Ah! yes, I remember, very good."

"I am listening."

"I prescribed an exercise for the evening; I expected to see my monks thin, pale, perspiring, and I had prepared a rather good sermon on this text: 'He who eats my bread.'"

"Dry bread," said Chicot.

"Exactly, dry bread," cried Gorenflot, expanding his great jaws with a cyclopean laugh, "I should have played on the word, and I laughed over it by myself for an hour, before I found myself in the middle of the court, in the presence of a troop of fellows, excited, nervous, and jumping about like grasshoppers. This is the illusion on which I wish to consult the scientists."

"Let us see the illusion."

"The smelling of wine a mile away."

"Of wine! Brother Borromée had betrayed you, then?"

"Oh! I am sure of Borromée," said Gorenflot; "he is passive obedience personified; if I were to say to Brother Borromée to kill himself by inches, he would instantly set about to find a gridiron and begin to heat the fagots."

"That is what it is to be a poor physiognomist," said Chicot, scratching his nose, "he does not give me that impression at all."

"It is possible, but I know my Borromée, you see, as well I know you, my dear Chicot," said Dom Modeste, who was growing tender as he became drunk.

"And you say they smelled of wine?"

"Borromée?"

"No, the monks."

"Like casks, without counting the fact that they were as red as lobsters; I mentioned the fact to Borromeé."

"Bravo!"

"Ah! I do not go to sleep."

"And what did he answer?"

"Listen, it was very subtle."

"I imagine so."

"He replied that a very great appetite produces results similar to those of gratified desires."

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot; "indeed that was very subtle, as you say; *ventre de biche!* He is a very strong man, your Borromée; I am no longer surprised that he has such a thin nose and lips; and this convinced you?"

"Entirely, and you will be convinced yourself, but we shall see; come a little nearer to me. for I can no longer move without feeling dizzy."

Chicot drew near.

Gorenflot made a speaking-tube of his large hand, which he applied to Chicot's ear.

"Well?" said Chicot.

"Well, I will continue. Do you recall the time when we were young, Chicot?"

"I remember."

"The time when the blood boiled — when mad desires" —

"Prior! Prior!" said modest Chicot.

"It is Borromée who speaks, and I maintain that he is right. Did not appetite sometimes produce the illusions of reality?"

Chicot began to laugh so loudly that the table with all its bottles trembled like the deck of a ship.

"Well, well," said he, "I will put myself in Brother Borromée's school, and when he shall have thoroughly infused his theories into me, I will ask a favor of you, my lord."

"It shall be granted you, Chicot, like everything else that you ask of your friend. Now tell me, what is this favor?"

"You shall give me the stewardship of the priory for just eight days."

"And what will you do during these eight days?"

"I will nourish Brother Borromée on his theories; I will serve him with a plate and an empty glass, and will say to him: 'Desire with all the strength of your hunger and thirst a turkey with mushrooms, and a bottle of Chambertin; but be careful not to get drunk with the Chambertin; be careful not to have indigestion from this turkey, dear philosopher.'"

"So," said Gorenflot, "you do not believe in appetite, pagan?"

"Well! well! I believe what I believe. But let us say no more about theories."

"So be it," said Gorenflot. "Let us say no more about theories, but let us talk a little about reality." And Gorenflot emptied a full glass.

"To that good time you spoke of just now, Chicot," said he, "to our suppers at the *Corne d'Abondance!*"

"Bravo! I thought you had forgotten all that, my lord."

"Profane one! All that sleeps under the majesty of my position; but by Heaven, I am always the same."

And Gorenflot began to sing his favorite song, in spite of the "hush" of Chicot:

"When the ass untethered is,
When the wine gives forth its fizz,
The happy ass uplifts his ears,
The wine in sparkling foam appears.
But naught is flatter than the monk
Who drinks, and drinks, until he 's drunk,
And naught is ever half so free,
As is the monk at liberty!"[1]

"Hush, hush, man!" cried Chicot, "if Brother Borromée were to enter, he would think that you had neither eaten nor drunk for a week."

"If Brother Borromée were to enter, he would sing with us."

"I do not believe it."

"And I, I tell you" —

"So keep still, and answer my questions."

"Speak, then."

"You do not give me a chance, drunkard."

"Oh! Drunk! I!"

"Well, the result of your exercise of arms is that your convent is turned into a veritable barracks."

"Yes, my friend, that is the word, veritable barracks, barracks veritable; last Thursday — was it Thursday? Yes, it was Thursday; wait a minute, I am not sure that it was Thursday."

"Thursday or Friday, the day makes no difference."

"That is so, the fact is everything, is it not? Well, Thurs-

[1] "*Quand l'ânon est deslâché,*
Quand le vin est débouché,
L'ânon dresse son oreille,
Le vin sort de la bouteille;
Mais rien n'est si éventé
Que le moine en pleine treille;
Mais rien n'est si desbâté
Que le moine en liberté."

day or Friday, in the corridor, I found two novices fighting each other with swords, and two seconds preparing to have a brush together on their own account."

"And what did you do?"

"I had a whip brought with which to thrash the novices, who fled; but Borromée" —

"Ah, ah! Borromée, Borromée again!"

"Always."

"But Borromée?"

"Borromée caught them, and flogged them for me in such a manner that they are still in bed, the wretches!"

"I shall have to ask to see their shoulders to appreciate the strength of Brother Borromée's arm," said Chicot.

"Disturb ourselves in order to see other shoulders than those of mutton? — never! Come, eat some of these apricot patés."

"No, by Heaven! I should choke."

"Drink, then."

"No more! I have to walk."

"Well, do you suppose that I do not have to walk? and yet I drink."

"Oh! it is different with you; and then to give commands you must have lungs."

"Then a glass, just one glass, of this digestive liqueur, of which Eusèbe alone knows the secret."

"Agreed."

"It is so efficacious that if one had dined like a glutton, one would be hungry two hours after dinner."

"What a recipe for the poor! Do you know that if I were king, I would have Eusèbe's head removed; his liqueur is capable of starving a kingdom. Oh! oh! what is that?"

"It is the exercise which is beginning," said Gorenflot.

In fact, a great clamor of voices and arms rose from the court.

"Without the leader?" said Chicot. "Oh! oh! the soldiers are poorly disciplined, it strikes me."

"Without me? Never!" said Gorenflot. "Moreover, that could not be, you understand, since it is I who command, since it is I who instruct; and listen, the proof is that I hear Brother Borromée coming for my orders."

In fact, at that very moment Borromée entered, casting at Chicot as oblique and swift a glance as the traitorous arrow of a Parthian.

"Oh! oh!" thought Chicot, "you were wrong to give me that look; it has betrayed you."

"Lord prior," said Borromée, "we are waiting for you to begin your examination of the arms and cuirasses."

"Cuirasses! oh! oh!" said Chicot to himself, softly, "one instant, I must go too, I must go too!" And he rose hurriedly.

"You will be present at my manœuvres," said Gorenflot, rising in turn, like a block of marble which took to itself legs; "your arm, my friend; you will see some fine drilling."

"The fact is that the lord prior is a profound tactician," said Borromée, sounding Chicot's imperturbable physiognomy.

"Dom Modeste is a superior man in all things," replied Chicot, bowing.

Then in a low tone to himself:

"Oh! oh!" he murmured, "we must play close, my eaglet, or there is a kite who will pluck out your feathers."

CHAPTER XXII.

BROTHER BORROMÉE.

As Chicot, supporting the reverend prior, descended the great stairway to the court of the priory, the first impression was that of an immense barracks in full activity.

Divided into two companies of one hundred men each, the monks, armed with halberd, pike, or musket, awaited like soldiers the coming of their commander.

About fifty of the strongest and most zealous had covered their heads with casques or helmets; long swords were attached to belts around their waists; absolutely nothing was lacking but a buckler to make them resemble the ancient Medes, or turned-up eyes to liken them to the modern Chinese. Others proudly spread out bulging cuirasses, against which they loved to rattle their iron gauntlets.

Still others, enclosed in armlets and thigh-pieces, exercised themselves in developing their joints deprived of elasticity by these partial shells.

Brother Borromée took a casque from the hands of a novice, and placed it on his head with a movement as easy and natural as a reiter or a German foot-soldier would have done.

While he was fastening the straps, Chicot could not refrain from looking at the helmet; and as he looked he smiled; at length, still smiling, he walked around Borromée, as though admiring him from every point.

He did more: he approached the treasurer and passed his hand over one of the projections of the helmet.

"You have a magnificent headpiece, Brother Borromée," said he; "where did you buy it, my dear prior?"

Gorenflot could not reply, because at that instant they were fastening on him a resplendent cuirass, which, although spacious enough for the Farnesian Hercules, painfully repressed the luxurious undulations of the worthy prior's flesh.

"Do not tie that so tight, by Heaven!" cried Gorenflot; "do not squeeze so hard; I shall suffocate, I shall have no more voice. Enough! enough!"

"You asked the reverend prior, I believe," said Borromée, "where he had bought my helmet?"

"I asked the reverend prior, and not you," replied Chicot, "because I presumed that in this convent, as in all others, nothing was done except by order of the superior."

"Certainly," said Gorenflot, "nothing is done here except by my order. What were you asking, dear Monsieur Briquet?"

"I asked Brother Borromée if he knew where this casque came from."

"It was part of a lot of armor which the reverend prior bought yesterday, in order to arm the convent."

"I?" said Gorenflot.

"Your lordship, you will remember, ordered several casques and cuirasses to be brought here, and the orders of your lordship have been carried out."

"That is true, that is true," said Gorenflot.

"*Ventre de biche!*" said Chicot, "my helmet was greatly attached to its master, since, having carried it myself to the Hôtel de Guise, like a lost dog, it finds me in the priory of the Jacobins!"

At that moment, upon a sign from Brother Borromée, the lines became straight, and silence settled upon the ranks.

Chicot seated himself on a bench, in order to enjoy the manœuvres at his ease.

Gorenflot stood as stiff on his legs as though they were two posts.

"Attention!" said Brother Borromée, in a low tone.

Dom Modeste drew a gigantic sabre from its iron scabbard, and brandishing it in the air, cried in stentorian tones:

"Attention!"

"Your reverence perhaps will tire yourself in giving the commands," said Brother Borromée, with gentle attention. "Your reverence was suffering this morning; if it please you to spare your precious health, I will command the drill to-day."

"I should indeed be glad," said Dom Modeste; "in fact, I am suffering, I am suffocating; proceed."

Borromée bowed, and like a man accustomed to this kind of assent, he took his position in front of the troop.

"What an obliging servant!" said Chicot; "that fellow is a treasure."

"He is charming! I told you so," replied Dom Modeste.

"I am sure that he does the same thing for you every day," said Chicot.

"Oh! every day. He is as submissive as a slave; I do nothing but reproach him for his kindnesses. Humility is not slavery," added Gorenflot, sententiously.

"So that you really have nothing to do here, and you can sleep on both ears; Brother Borromée watches for you?"

"Oh! my God, yes!"

"That is what I wanted to know," said Chicot, whose attention was fixed on Borromée alone.

It was marvellous to see the treasurer of the monks, like a war-horse bridling under the harness. His dilated eyes looked like balls of fire; his strong arm gave such clever exhibitions of the sword that one would have said he was a veritable master fencing before a company of soldiers.

Each time that Brother Borromée made a demonstration, Gorenflot repeated it, adding:

"Borromée is right; but I have already told you that; remember my lesson of yesterday. Pass the weapon from one hand to the other; hold up the pike, hold it up; the steel on a level with your eye; steady, by Saint George! firm; a half turn to the left is exactly the same as a half turn to the right, except that it is just the opposite."

"*Ventre de biche!*" said Chicot, "you are a very clever instructor."

"Yes, yes," said Gorenflot, caressing his triple chin. "I understand the manœuvres well enough."

DOM MODESTE DREW A GIGANTIC SABRE FROM ITS IRON SCABBARD AND, BRANDISHING IT IN THE AIR, CRIED, "ATTENTION!"

"And you have an excellent pupil in Borromée."

"He understands me," said Gorenflot; "he is as intelligent as can be."

The monks went through the drill, a sort of manœuvre greatly in vogue at that time, the passes with gun, sword, pike, and the other exercises, with spirit.

When they came to the last test:

"You will see my little Jacques," said the prior to Chicot.

"Who is your little Jacques?"

"A nice fellow whom I have wished to attach to my person, because to all appearances he is calm, with a strong hand, but with all that as quick as a flash."

"Ah, indeed! And where is this charming fellow?"

"Wait, wait, I will point him out to you; there, see, over yonder; the one holding a musket in his hand, and who is the first ready to fire."

"And he aims well?"

"Even at a distance of a hundred feet, the fellow does not fail to hit the mark."

"He is one who ought to assist you at mass, but it is your turn to wait now."

"What?"

"Why, yes! — but no!"

"You know my little Jacques?"

"I? Not in the least.

"But you thought you knew him at first?"

"Yes, it seemed as though I had seen him in a certain church one day, or rather one night when I was shut up in a confessional; but no, I was mistaken, it is not he."

This time, we must admit, Chicot's words were not exactly in accordance with the truth. Chicot was too good a physiognomist ever to forget a face when he had once seen it.

While he was the unconscious object of the attention of the prior and his friend, little Jacques, as Gorenflot called him, was loading a heavy musket as long as himself. When this was done he proudly took his position a hundred feet from the mark; and then, bringing back his right leg with a precision wholly military, he took aim.

The shot was fired, and the ball lodged in the centre of the mark, amid the loud applause of the monks.

"By Heaven, that is well aimed," said Chicot; "on my word, he is a pretty boy."

"Thank you, monsieur," replied Jacques, whose pale cheeks flushed with pleasure.

"You handle arms skilfully, my boy," went on Chicot.

"Oh! monsieur, I am only practising," said Jacques.

And with these words he laid down his musket, after the proof of skill which he had given, took a pike from the hands of his neighbor, and twirled it round in a way that Chicot considered perfect.

The latter renewed his compliments.

"It is especially with the sword that he excels," said Dom Modeste. "Those who understand it consider him very good; it is true that the rascal has muscles of iron, wrists of steel, and that he scrapes the sword from morning till night."

"Ah! let us see it," said Chicot.

"You wish to test his strength?" asked Borromée.

"I should like to prove it," replied Chicot.

"Ah!" continued the treasurer, "no one here except perhaps myself is capable of fencing with him; do you handle the sword?"

"I am only a poor bourgeois," said Chicot, shaking his head; "once I could fence as well as any one; but to-day my limbs tremble, my arm shakes, and my head is no longer steady."

"But you practise still?" said Borromée.

"A little," replied Chicot, glancing at Gorenflot, who smiled and uttered the name of Nicolas David.

But Borromée neither saw the look nor heard the name, and with a calm smile ordered the foils and fencing-masks brought out.

Jacques, eager with delight, under his cold and quiet manner raised his gown as far as his knees, and fixed his sandals firm in the sand as he made his challenge.

"Indeed," said Chicot, "since I am neither monk nor soldier it is some time since I have practised with arms, therefore I beg you, Brother Borromée, you, who are nothing but muscles and tendons, to be good enough to give the lesson to Brother Jacques. Will you consent to it, dear prior?" asked Chicot of Dom Modeste.

"I order it!" exclaimed the prior, always delighted to give a command.

Borromée took off his helmet, Chicot hastened to extend his hands, and the casque, placed in them, again permitted its former master to prove its identity; then, while our bourgeois

examined it, the treasurer tucked his gown into his belt and made ready. All the monks, animated by party spirit, formed a circle about the professor and pupil. Gorenflot leaned over to his friend's ear.

"It is as entertaining as chanting vespers; is it not?" said he, innocently.

"That is what the light horse would say," replied Chicot in the same naïve way.

The two combatants put themselves on guard; Borromée, quick and nervous, had the advantage of height; he had besides assurance and experience.

Fire shot in swift gleams from the eyes of Jacques, and brought an excited flush to his cheeks. Little by little they saw the religious mask fall from Borromée, as, foil in hand. and carried away by the alluring action of the trial of skill, he was transformed into a man-of-arms; he accompanied each thrust with an exhortation, a suggestion, or a reproach; but often the strength, the promptness, and the energy of Jacques triumphed over the qualities of his master, and Brother Borromée received a good thrust full in the chest. Chicot devoured the spectacle with his eyes, and counted the thrusts.

When the onset was over, or rather when the fencers made a first halt,

"Jacques has touched six times," said Chicot, "Brother Borromée nine; that is rather pretty for the pupil, but not enough for the master."

A flash, unnoticed by all except Chicot, passed from Borromée's eyes, and revealed a new trait in his character.

"Ah!" thought Chicot, "he is proud."

"Monsieur," replied Borromée, in a tone which with great difficulty he managed to keep gentle, "the exercise of arms is very hard for every one, and especially for poor monks like us."

"No matter," said Chicot, determined to force Maître Borromée to his limit; "the master ought not to have less than half the advantage over his pupil."

"Ah! Monsieur Briquet," said Borromée, pale and biting his lips, "you are very positive, it seems to me."

"Good! he is angry," thought Chicot, "two mortal sins; they say that one is enough to damn a man. I have a good hand."

Then aloud:

"And if Jacques were more calm," said he, "I am sure that he would give equal play."

"I do not think so," said Borromée.

"Well, I am sure of it."

"Monsieur Briquet, who understands arms," said Borromée in a bitter tone, "should test Jacques' strength by himself; then he would be better able to judge."

"Oh! I am old," said Chicot.

"Yes, but skilful," said Borromée.

"Ah! you are joking," thought Chicot; "wait, wait. But," he continued, "there is one thing which detracts from the value of my observation."

"What is that?"

"That Brother Borromée, like a worthy master, I am sure, let Jacques touch a little out of kindness."

"Ah! ah!" said Jacques, scowling in turn.

"No, indeed," replied Borromée, keeping control over himself, but inwardly exasperated; "I love Jacques, of course, but I do not spoil him with that kind of kindness."

"It is astonishing," said Chicot, as though speaking to himself, "I thought so; excuse me."

"But come," said Borromée, "try for yourself, Monsieur Briquet."

"Oh, do not intimidate me," said Chicot.

"Be easy, monsieur," said Borromée, "we will be indulgent to you; we know the laws of the church."

"Heathen!" murmured Chicot.

"Come, Monsieur Briquet, just one pass."

"Try," said Gorenflot, "try."

"I will not hurt you, monsieur," said Jacques, in turn taking the part of his master, and desiring to have his little fling; "I have a very light hand."

"Dear child!" murmured Chicot, giving the young monk an inexpressible glance which ended in a silent laugh.

"Well," said he, "since every one wishes it" —

"Ah! bravo!" cried those interested, with the appetite of triumph.

"But," said Chicot, "I warn you that I accept only three passes."

"As you wish, monsieur," said Jacques.

Rising slowly from the bench on which he had seated himself, Chicot tightened his doublet, drew on his gauntlets,

and adjusted his mask with the agility of a tortoise catching flies.

"If this fellow succeeds in parrying your straight thrusts," whispered Borromée to Jacques, "I will never fence with you again; I warn you."

Jacques gave a nod of the head, accompanied by a smile which meant:

"Be easy, master."

Chicot, with the same slowness and the same care, put himself on guard, straightened out his long arms and legs, which, by a miracle of precision, he disposed so as to hide their enormous elasticity and incalculable development.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LESSON.

At this time, not only the events, but also the customs and habits of which we are trying to describe, fencing was not what it is to-day.

The swords, sharp at both edges, were such that they could strike almost as often with the edge as the point; moreover, the left hand, armed with a dagger, was at once defensive and offensive; the result was a number of wounds or rather scratches, which in a real combat were a powerful motive for excitement.

Quélus, losing blood from eighteen wounds, still stood erect, continued to fight, and would not have fallen had not a nineteenth wound sent him to his bed, which he left only for the tomb.

Fencing, brought from Italy, but still in the infancy of its art, consisted, therefore, at this time, in a number of evolutions which considerably displaced the fencer, and, on a ground chosen at random, and possibly uneven, he must have encountered a number of obstacles. It was not unusual to see a fencer bend forward, draw back, spring to the right or left, and lean one hand on the ground; agility, not only of hand and of limb, but of the whole body, was one of the first conditions of the art.

Chicot did not seem to have learned fencing in this school; one would have said, on the contrary, that he had anticipated

the modern art, the superiority and especially the whole grace of which lies in the agility of the hands and the almost absolute repose of the body.

He stood erect and firm on both legs, with a wrist at once supple and nervous, with a sword which seemed a flexible and pliant reed from the point to the middle of the blade, and which was of inflexible steel from there to the guard.

At the first passes, seeing before him this man of bronze, whose wrist alone seemed alive, Brother Jacques showed some impatience, which produced on Chicot no other effect than to make him straighten his arm and limb at the slightest opening which he perceived in the play of his adversary; and one can understand that with this habit of striking as much with the edge as the point, these openings were frequent.

At each of these openings, Chicot's great arm was thrust forward three feet, and dealt straight at the brother's breast a stroke of the button as methodical as though directed by some mechanism, and not by an organ of flesh, uncertain and uneven.

At each of these strokes of the button, Jacques, crimson with anger and ambition, sprang back.

For ten minutes the boy displayed every resource of his prodigious agility; he sprang like a tiger, he coiled like a serpent, he glided under the breast of Chicot, springing to right and left, but the latter, with his quiet manner and his long arm, seized his opportunity, and, warding off the foil of his adversary, always sent the terrible button home.

Brother Borromée grew pale from the suppression of all the passions which had lately roused him.

At length Jacques rushed a last time at Chicot, who, seeing that he was shaky on his legs, offered him an opening in order that he might make a lunge.

Jacques did not miss it, and Chicot, parrying with swiftness, caused the poor boy to lose his balance so that he forgot his nerve and fell.

Chicot, motionless as a rock, remained in the same place.

Brother Borromée bit his fingers till they bled.

"You did not tell us, monsieur, that you were a pillar of the fencing-school," said he.

"He!" cried Gorenflot, wonder-struck, but triumphant from a feeling of friendship easy to understand: "he! why, he never goes out!"

"I, a poor bourgeois," said Chicot; "I, Robert Briquet, a pillar of the fencing-school! Oh, Monsieur Treasurer!"

"But indeed, monsieur," cried Brother Borromée, "in order to handle a sword as you do, you must have had great practice."

"Well, my God, yes, monsieur," replied Chicot, good-naturedly. "As a matter of fact I have sometimes held a sword; but in holding it I have always noticed one thing."

"What?"

"That for the one who holds it, pride is a bad counsellor, and anger a poor aid. Now listen, my young Brother Jacques," he added, "you have a pretty wrist, but you have neither legs nor head; you are quick, but you do not reason. There are three essential points in fencing: first the head, then the hand, and finally the legs; with the first one may defend one's self; with the first and the second one may win; but by combining the three, one always wins."

"Oh, monsieur," said Jacques, "have a match with Brother Borromée; it will surely be a fine thing to see."

Chicot, disdainful, was about to refuse the suggestion; but he reflected that perhaps the proud treasurer would take advantage of it.

"Well," said he, "if Brother Borromée consents, I am at his disposal."

"No, monsieur," replied the treasurer; "I should be defeated; I prefer to admit this rather than prove it."

"Oh! how modest, how amiable he is!" said Gorenflot.

"You are mistaken," replied the pitiless Chicot into his ear, "he is mad with vanity; at his age, if I had had such a chance I would have begged on my knees for the lesson which Jacques has just received." Whereupon, Chicot resumed his stooping back, his bent limbs, his eternal grimace, and seated himself again on his bench.

Jacques followed him, the admiration of the man prevailing over the shame of his defeat.

"Give me some lessons, Monsieur Briquet," said he; "the lord prior will allow it, will you not, your reverence?"

"Yes, my child," replied Gorenflot, "with pleasure."

"I do not want to step into your master's province, my friend," said Chicot, and he bowed to Borromée.

Borromée spoke.

"I am not Jacques' only master," said he, "I am not the

only one who teaches arms here; not having the honor all to myself, permit me not to take all the defeat."

"Who is his other instructor, then?" hastily demanded Chicot, seeing on Borromée's face the flush which betrayed his fear of having committed an imprudence.

"No one," said Borromée, "no one."

"Yes, yes!" said Chicot, "I heard perfectly. Who is your master, Jacques?"

"Ah! yes, yes," said Gorenflot, "a short, fat fellow whom you presented to me, Borromée, and who occasionally comes here; a good face and a pleasant drinker."

"I do not remember his name," said Borromée.

Brother Eusèbe, with his sanctimonious mien and his knife in his belt, advanced simpering.

"I know it," said he.

Borromée made numerous signs to him which he did not see.

"It is Maître Bussy Leclerc," he continued, "the one who was fencing-master at Brussels."

"Ah! oh!" said Chicot; "Maître Bussy Leclerc! A good swordsman, in faith!"

And as he said this with all the innocence of which he was capable, Chicot caught the furious glance which Borromée darted at the smiling but unfortunate Eusèbe.

"Ah! I did not know that he was named Bussy Leclerc. They forgot to tell me," said Gorenflot.

"I did not suppose that the name would be of the slightest interest to your lordship," said Borromée.

"In fact," said Chicot, "one fencing-master or another, what difference does it make, provided he is good?"

"In fact, no difference at all," said Gorenflot, "provided he is good." Whereupon he started toward the staircase that led to his apartment, followed by the admiration of all.

The exercise was over.

At the foot of the staircase Jacques repeated his request to Chicot, to the great displeasure of Borromée; but Chicot replied:

"I do not know how to teach, my friend. I taught myself all alone, by thought and practice; do as I did; success follows every earnest effort."

Borromée ordered a movement which turned all the monks toward the buildings for the return.

Gorenflot leaned on Chicot and majestically ascended the staircase.

"I hope," said he, with pride, "that here is a house devoted to the service of the King, and good for something, eh?"

"Plague it! I well believe it," said Chicot; "one sees fine things, reverend prior, when one visits you."

"In one month all this, in less than a month, even."

"And done by you?"

"Done by me, by me alone, as you see," said Gorenflot, straightening himself.

"It is more than I expected, my friend, and when I return from my mission" —

"Ah! that is true, dear friend; let us speak of your mission!"

"The more willingly as I have a message, or rather a messenger, to send to the King before my departure."

"To the King, dear friend, a messenger? You correspond, then, with the King?"

"Directly."

"And you need a messenger, you say?"

"I need a messenger."

"Do you want one of our brethren? It would be an honor for the convent if one of our brethren were to see the King."

"Assuredly."

"I will place two of our best legs at your disposal. But tell me, Chicot, how the King, who believed you dead" —

"I have already told you that I was merely in a lethargy, and at the right moment I came back to life again."

"And restored to favor?" demanded Gorenflot.

"More than ever," said Chicot.

"Then," said Gorenflot, stopping, "you can tell the King everything that we do here in his interest?"

"I shall not fail to do so, my friend, I shall not fail; be easy."

"Oh! dear Chicot," cried Gorenflot, who saw himself a bishop.

"But first, I have two things to ask of you."

"What are they?"

"The first is money, which the King will return to you."

"Money!" cried Gorenflot, rising hastily, "my coffers are full of it."

"You are very fortunate, by my faith," said Chicot.

"Do you want a thousand crowns?"

"No, that is much too much, dear friend; I am modest in my tastes, humble in my desires; my title of ambassador does not make me proud, and I hide it rather than boast of it; one hundred crowns will suffice."

"Here they are. And the second thing?"

"A squire."

"A squire?"

"Yes, to accompany me. I like society."

"Ah! my friend, if I were only free as I once was," said Gorenflot, heaving a sigh.

"Yes, but you are not."

"Greatness ties me down," murmured Gorenflot.

"Alas!" said Chicot; "one cannot do everything at the same time; not being able to have your honorable company, my very dear prior, I will content myself with that of young Brother Jacques."

"Young Brother Jacques?"

"Yes; the fellow pleases me."

"You are right, Chicot; he is an unusual boy and will amount to something."

"I will first take him two hundred and fifty miles, if you will allow me."

"He is yours, my friend."

The prior rang a bell, at the sound of which a brother servant appeared.

"Send Brother Jacques to me, and the brother who carries messages to the city."

Ten minutes later both appeared on the threshold of the door.

"Jacques," said Gorenflot, "I am going to give you a special mission."

"Me, Monsieur le Prior?" said the young man, surprised.

"Yes; you are to accompany Monsieur Robert Briquet on a long journey."

"Oh!" exclaimed the young brother, delighted at the thought of travelling, "I go on a journey with Monsieur Briquet? I, out of doors, at liberty! Ah! Monsieur Robert Briquet, we will practise fencing every day, shall we not?"

"Yes, my child."

"And I may carry my musket?"

"You may carry it."

Jacques gave a jump and rushed from the room with shouts of joy.

"As to the commission," said Gorenflot, "I beg you to give your orders. Approach, Brother Panurge."

"Panurge!" said Chicot, to whom this name recalled memories which were not without tenderness; "Panurge!"

"Alas! yes," said Gorenflot, "I chose this brother, who has the same name as the other Panurge, to make journeys like the other one."

"Is our old friend out of service, then?"

"He is dead," said Gorenflot; "he is dead."

"Oh!" said Chicot with commiseration. "The fact is he must have been getting old."

"Nineteen years, my friend; he was nineteen years old."

"That is a case of remarkable longevity," said Chicot; "the convents alone offer such examples!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PENITENT.

Thus announced by the prior, Panurge soon appeared. It was certainly not on account of his moral or physical configuration that he had been allowed to replace his defunct namesake, for never had a more intelligent face been dishonored by the application of the name of ass.

It was a fox that Brother Panurge resembled, with his small eyes, pointed nose, and protruding jaw.

Chicot watched him a moment, and during that moment, short as it was, he seemed to appreciate the value of the convent messenger.

Panurge stood humbly by the door.

"Come here, Monsieur le Courier," said Chicot. "Do you know the Louvre?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied Panurge.

"And in the Louvre, do you know a certain Henry of Valois?"

"The King?"

"I do not know if he is really the King," said Chicot; "but at least we are in the habit of calling him so."

"It is with the King that I have to do?"

"Exactly. Do you know him?"

"Very well, Monsieur Briquet."

"Well, you will ask to speak with him."

"Will they let me enter?"

"As far as his valet, yes; your gown is a passport; his Majesty is very religious, as you know."

"And what shall I say to his Majesty's valet?"

"You will say that you are sent by the Shade."

"By what shade?"

"Curiosity is a bad fault, brother."

"Pardon me."

"You will say, then, that you are sent by the Shade."

"Yes."

"And that you are waiting for the letter."

"What letter?"

"Again!"

"Ah! that is true."

"Reverend prior," said Chicot, turning to Gorenflot, "I really prefer the other Panurge."

"That is all there is to do?" asked the courier.

"You will add that the Shade will wait, going slowly along the road to Charenton."

"It is on this road that I am to rejoin you, then?"

"Exactly."

Panurge proceeded to the door, and as he raised the portière to go out it seemed to Chicot that he unmasked a listener. But the portière fell back so rapidly that Chicot could not say positively whether that which he took for reality was anything but an illusion or not; his subtle mind, however, quickly led him to the almost certain conclusion that Brother Borromée was there.

"Ah! you are listening," he thought; "so much the better; in that case I will speak for your benefit."

"So," said Gorenflot, "you are honored with a mission from the King, dear friend."

"Confidential, yes."

"Which has to do with politics, I presume."

"And I too presume so."

"What! you do not know with what mission you are charged?"

"I know that I carry a letter, that is all."

"A state secret, no doubt?"

"I suppose so."

"You do not doubt it?"

"We are sufficiently alone for me to tell you what I think, are we not?"

"Speak; I am a tomb for secrets."

"Well, the King has finally decided to aid the Duc d'Anjou."

"Really?"

"Yes; Monsieur de Joyeuse was to have set out this evening for this purpose."

"But you, my friend?"

"I am going in the direction of Spain."

"And how shall you travel?"

"Why! as we used to do, on foot, on horseback, by carriage, as best we can."

"Jacques will be good company for the journey, and you did well to ask for him; he understands Latin, the young rascal!"

"I confess for my part that he pleases me greatly."

"That would be reason enough for me to give him to you, my friend; but I think, besides, that he will be a formidable second for you in case of any encounter."

"Thanks, dear friend; now I have nothing further to do, I think, than to bid you adieu."

"Adieu!"

"What are you doing?"

"Preparing to give you my blessing."

"Bah! between us," said Chicot, "that is useless."

"You are right," replied Gorenflot, "it is good for strangers only."

The two friends embraced each other tenderly.

"Jacques!" cried the prior, "Jacques!"

Panurge showed his fox-like face between the portières.

"What! You are not yet gone?" cried Chicot.

"Pardon, monsieur."

"Go quickly," said Gorenflot, "Monsieur Briquet is in a hurry. Where is Jacques?"

Brother Borromée appeared in turn, sweet and smiling.

"Brother Jacques!" repeated the prior.

"Brother Jacques has gone," said the treasurer.

"Gone!" cried Chicot.

"Did you not want some one to go to the Louvre, monsieur?"

"But it was Brother Panurge," said Gorenflot.

"Oh! how stupid I am! I understood that it was Jacques," said Borromée, slapping his forehead.

Chicot scowled; but Borromée's regret was apparently so sincere that a reproach would have seemed cruel.

"I will wait, then," said he, "until Jacques returns."

Borromée bowed, frowning in turn.

"By the way," said he, "I forgot to announce to the lord prior, and I came up on purpose to do so, that the unknown lady has just arrived and that she desires to have an audience with your reverence."

Chicot opened his large ears.

"Alone?" asked Gorenflot.

"With a servant."

"Is she young?" asked Gorenflot.

Borromée modestly lowered his eyes.

"Good! He is a hypocrite," thought Chicot.

"She seems young!" said Borromée.

"My friend," said Gorenflot, turning to the false Robert Briquet, "you understand?"

"I understand," said Chicot, "and I will leave you; I will wait in an adjoining room or in the court."

"Do so, my dear friend."

"It is far from here to the Louvre, monsieur," observed Borromée, "and Brother Jacques may be greatly delayed, especially as the person to whom you write may perhaps hesitate to entrust a letter of importance to a child."

"You make this reflection somewhat late, Brother Borromée."

"Why! I did not know; if you had confided in me" —

"Well, well, I will start and walk slowly towards Charenton; whoever the messenger is he will overtake me on the road."

And he started toward the stairway.

"Not that way, monsieur, if you please," said Borromée, quickly; "the unknown lady is coming up there, and she particularly wishes to meet no one."

"You are right," said Chicot, smiling; "I will take the small stairway."

And he advanced toward a private door leading to a small study.

"And I," said Borromée, "shall have the honor of introducing the penitent to the reverend prior."

"That is so," said Gorenflot.

"You know the way?" asked Borromée, anxiously.

"Perfectly."

Chicot went into the study; adjoining this was a room in which was the head of the private stairway.

Chicot had spoken the truth; he knew the way, but he did not know the room.

In fact, it had been greatly changed since his last visit: from peaceful it had grown warlike — the sides of the walls were covered with arms; the tables and the stands were loaded with sabres, swords, and pistols; every corner was a nest of muskets and arquebuses. Chicot paused for a moment in this room; he felt the need of reflecting.

"They hide Jacques from me, they hide the lady from me, they drive me to the small stairway, in order to leave the large one free; that means they wish to keep me away from the young monk, and to hide the lady from me; it is evident I ought to make a strategic move, and do exactly the opposite of what they wish me to do. Consequently, I shall await the return of Jacques, and I shall place myself so that I can see the mysterious lady. Oh! oh! here is a beautiful shirt of mail thrown into this corner, supple, fine, and of exquisite quality."

He raised it admiringly.

"Just what I was looking for," said he; "as light as linen, and much too narrow for the prior; in truth, one would say that this shirt had been made for me. We will borrow it, therefore, from Dom Modeste; I will give it back to him on my return."

And Chicot hastily folded the tunic and slipped it under his doublet.

He was fastening the last knot when Brother Borromée appeared on the threshold.

"Oh! oh!" murmured Chicot, "you again! but you come too late, friend."

And crossing his long arms behind him, Chicot turned his back as though to admire the trophies.

"Monsieur Robert Briquet is looking for some arms to his liking?" asked Borromée.

"My dear friend," said Chicot, "what should I do with weapons?"

"But when one handles them so well."

"Theory, dear brother, theory, that is all; a poor bourgeois like myself may be clever with his arms and legs, but what he lacks, and what he will always lack, is the spirit of a soldier. The foil shines brightly enough in my hand, but Jacques, believe me, would make me jump from here to Charenton with the point of a sword."

"Really!" said Borromée, half convinced by the simple, good-natured manner of Chicot, who had made himself more hump-backed, more crooked, and more squint-eyed than ever.

"And then my breath fails me," went on Chicot; "you noticed that I could not bend; my legs are execrable; that is my chief defect."

"Permit me to observe, monsieur, that this defect is still greater for travelling than for exercising with arms."

"Ah! you know that I am going to travel?" said Chicot, carelessly.

"Panurge told me so," replied Borromée, reddening.

"Why, that is queer. I did not think I had spoken of it to Panurge; but no matter, I have no reason for hiding the fact. Yes, brother, I am taking a short trip; I am going to my own country where I have property."

"Do you know, Monsieur Briquet, that you have procured a very great honor for Brother Jacques?"

"That of accompanying me?"

"In the first place, but afterwards that of seeing the King."

"Or his valet, for it is possible and even probable that Brother Jacques will see no one else."

"You are intimate at the Louvre?"

"Oh! very, monsieur. It is I who furnish the King and the young lords of the court with milled hosiery."

"The King?"

"I already had his custom when he was only duke of Anjou. On his return from Poland he remembered me and appointed me court furnisher.

"You have a fine connection there, Monsieur Briquet."

"My connection with his Majesty?"

"Yes."

"Every one does not say that, Brother Borromée."

"Oh! the Leaguers."

"Every one is more or less that to-day."

"You are *less*, surely."

"I, why?"

"When one knows the King personally."

"Well! well! I have my politics, like others," said Chicot.

"Yes, but your politics harmonize with those of the King."

"Don't you believe it; we often dispute."

"If you dispute how can he entrust you with a mission?"

"A commission, you mean?"

"Mission or commission, no matter which, either the one or the other implies confidence."

"Pooh! provided that I understand how to take my measurements, that is all that is necessary for the King."

"Your measurements!"

"Yes."

"Political measurements, financial measurements?"

"No, measurements of cloths."

"How?" said Borromée, astonished.

"Without doubt you will understand."

"I am listening."

"You know that the King made a pilgrimage to Notre Dame de Chartres."

"Yes, to obtain an heir."

"Exactly. You know that there is a sure means of arriving at the result desired by the King?"

"It seems, at all events, that the King does not employ this means."

"Brother Borromée!" said Chicot.

"What?"

"You know perfectly well that it is a question of obtaining an heir to the crown by a miracle, and not otherwise."

"And this miracle they ask for?"

"Is at Notre Dame de Chartres."

"Ah! yes, the chemise!"

"Come, now! that's it. The King took the chemise from this good Notre Dame, and gave it to the Queen, so that in exchange for this chemise, he wants to give the former a robe similar to that of Notre Dame of Toledo, which is, they say, the most beautiful and the richest robe of the Virgin that exists in the world."

"So that you are going" —

"To Toledo, dear Brother Borromée, to Toledo, to take the measurements of this robe and make one like it."

Borromée seemed to hesitate as to whether he should believe

Chicot or not. After mature reflection, we are authorized to suppose that he did not believe him.

"You may judge, therefore," continued Chicot, as though he had utterly forgotten what was passing in the mind of the treasurer, "you may judge, therefore, whether the society of churchmen would not have been very agreeable under such circumstances. But time goes on, and Brother Jacques cannot be long now. Besides, I will wait outside for him — at the Croix Faubin, for instance."

"I think that will be better," said Borromée.

"You will have the kindness, then, to tell him as soon as he comes?"

"Yes."

"And you will send him to me?"

"I will not fail to do so."

"Thanks, dear Brother Borromée, charmed to have made your acquaintance."

Both bowed; Chicot descended the small staircase; behind him, Brother Borromée closed and locked the door.

"Well, well," said Chicot, "it is important, it seems, that I should not see the lady; I must, therefore, arrange to see her."

In order to put this project into execution, Chicot left the priory of the Jacobins with as much ostentation as possible, spoke an instant with the gate-keeper, and set out toward the Croix Faubin, keeping in the middle of the road.

But, once arrived at the Croix Faubin, he disappeared around a corner of the wall of a farm, and there, feeling that he could defy all the arguses of the priory, had they the eyes of a falcon, like Borromée, he glided along the buildings, followed through a ditch a winding hedge, and without having been seen, reached a thick hedge of elm trees which extended directly opposite the convent.

Arrived at this point, which offered him all that he could desire as a centre of observation, he seated himself or rather lay down, and waited for Brother Jacques to return and enter the convent, and for the lady to come out.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE AMBUSCADE.

Chicot, we know, was not long in making up his mind.

He decided to wait, and as comfortably as possible.

He made an opening in the thick hedge, so that he might not miss seeing those who came and went who might be of interest to him.

The road was deserted.

As far as Chicot's eye could reach, he saw neither horseman, beggar, nor peasant.

The whole crowd of the previous evening had vanished with the spectacle that had caused it. Chicot saw nothing, then, but a man rather shabbily dressed, who was walking across the road, taking measurements with a long pointed stick on the pavement of his Majesty the King of France.

Chicot had absolutely nothing to do.

He was delighted to have found this man, who would be something for him to look at.

What was he measuring? Why was he measuring? Such, for one or two minutes, were the most serious reflections of Maître Robert Briquet.

He therefore determined not to lose sight of him.

Unfortunately, at the moment when, arrived at the end of his measuring, the man was about to raise his head, a more important discovery arose to absorb his attention, forcing him to turn his eyes in another direction.

The folding windows on Gorenflot's balcony opened, and there appeared the respectable rotundity of Dom Modeste, who, with his great wide-open eyes, his holiday smile, and his most gallant manner, led out a lady almost wholly enveloped in a mantle of velvet trimmed with fur.

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot to himself, "here is the penitent. Her appearance is youthful; let us see her head a little; there, there, turn a little this way; that is fine! It is really singular that I find resemblances in every face I see. Sorry mania that I have! Good, there is the attendant. Oh! oh! as to him, I am not mistaken; it is indeed De Mayneville. Yes, yes; the turned-up mustache, the basket-hilted sword — it is he himself. But let us reason a little: if I am not deceived in

De Mayneville, *ventre de biche!* why should I be deceived in Madame de Montpensier? for that woman, yes, yes! by Heaven! it is the duchess."

Chicot, one may well believe, from this moment abandoned the man who was measuring, so as not to lose sight of the two illustrious personages.

At the end of a second he saw the pale face of Borromée appear behind them, to whom Mayneville put several questions.

"Yes," said he, "so it is with every one; bravo! let us plot, it is the fashion; but the devil! Does the duchess, by chance, want to take rooms at Dom Modeste's? — she already has a house at Bel Esbat, a hundred feet from here."

Just then Chicot was given a new cause of excitement.

While the duchess was talking with Gorenflot, or rather making him talk, Monsieur de Mayneville signed to some one outside.

Chicot, however, had seen no one, except the man who was measuring.

It was, in fact, to him that the sign had been made; the result was that the man who was measuring measured no more. He stopped in front of the balcony, his face turned in the direction of Paris.

Gorenflot continued his amiabilities with the penitent.

Monsieur de Mayneville whispered a few words into Borromée's ear, and the latter instantly began to gesticulate behind the prior, in a manner unintelligible to Chicot, but clear, apparently, to the man who was measuring, for the latter moved off and took his position in another place, where another sign from Borromée and De Mayneville nailed him like a statue.

After standing motionless for a few seconds, at another sign from Brother Borromée he gave himself up to a kind of exercise which interested Chicot the more in that it was impossible for him to guess its meaning.

From the place he occupied, the man who was measuring began to run to the door of the priory, while Monsieur de Mayneville held his watch in his hand.

"The devil! the devil!" murmured Chicot. "All this looks suspicious; the enigma is well put; but, perhaps by seeing the face of the man who is measuring, I may guess it."

Just then, as if the evil genius of Chicot had set out to grant his wish, the man who was measuring turned, and Chicot recognized him as Nicholas Poulain, lieutenant of the provost-

ship, the very one to whom, on the previous evening, he had sold his old cuirasses.

"Ah!" said he, "long live the League! I have now seen enough to guess the rest, with a little work! Well, so be it! we will work."

After some conversation between the duchess, Gorenflot, and de Mayneville, Borromée closed the window, and the balcony became deserted.

The duchess and her attendant came out of the priory and entered the litter that awaited them.

Dom Modeste, who had accompanied them to the door, exhausted himself in bows.

The duchess was still holding back the curtains of the litter to reply to the compliments of the prior, when a Jacobin monk, coming from Paris by the Porte Saint Antoine, appeared at the head of the horses, which he looked at curiously, then at the side of the litter, into which he gazed.

Chicot recognized this monk as the young Brother Jacques, returning in great haste from the Louvre, and now standing in ecstasy before Madame de Montpensier.

"Well, well," said he, "I am in luck. If Jacques had returned sooner, I would not have seen the duchess, compelled as I was to run to my meeting-place at the Croix Faubin. Here is Madame de Montpensier leaving after her little conspiracy is arranged; now it is Maître Nicholas Poulain's turn. I will settle him in ten minutes."

In short, the duchess, having passed in front of Chicot without seeing him, was rolling away toward Paris and Nicholas Poulain was preparing to follow.

Like the duchess, it was necessary for the latter to pass by the hedge behind which lay Chicot.

Chicot saw him coming, as a hunter sees the game and makes himself ready to fire when it comes within shot.

When Poulain had come within range of Chicot, Chicot fired his words.

"Well, my good fellow," said he from his hole, "a look in my direction, if you please."

Poulain gave a start and turned his head toward the ditch.

"You have seen me, very good!" said Chicot; "now look as though you saw nothing, Maître Nicholas — Poulain."

The lieutenant of the provostship bounded like a deer at the sound of a gun.

"Who are you?" said he, "and what do you want?"

"Who am I?"

"Yes."

"I am one of your friends; new, but intimate. What do I want? Ah! that is somewhat long to explain to you."

"But what do you want? Speak."

"I want you to come to me."

"To you?"

"Yes, here; I want you to step down into the ditch."

"Why?"

"You shall know why; step down first."

"But" —

"And I want you to sit down with your back against this hedge."

"Well" —

"Without looking toward me, without your appearing to suspect that I am here."

"Monsieur" —

"It is a good deal to ask, I well know; but what can you expect? Maître Robert Briquet has the right to demand."

"Robert Briquet!" exclaimed Poulain, at the same time doing as he was told.

"There, there, sit down; that's it. Ah! ah! it seems that we were taking our little measurements on the road to Vincennes!"

"I?"

"Without a doubt; after all, what is there surprising in the fact that a lieutenant of the provostship should carry out the duty of overseer of the roads, when the opportunity occurs?"

"That is true," said Poulain, somewhat reassured, "you see I was measuring."

"And much the better," continued Chicot, "since you were working under the eyes of very illustrious personages."

"Of very illustrious personages? I do not understand."

"What! you did not know" —

"I do not know what you mean."

"That lady and gentleman who were on the balcony, and who have just gone back to Paris; you do not know who they are?"

"I swear to you."

"Ah! how fortunate it is for me to tell you such rich news!

Imagine, Monsieur Poulain! you had for admirers, in your duties of overseer, Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier and Monsieur le Comte de Mayneville. Do not stir, if you please."

"Monsieur," said Nicholas Poulain, trying to struggle, "these suggestions, the manner in which you make them to me" —

"If you move, my dear Monsieur Poulain," replied Chicot, "you will drive me to something rash. Keep quiet, then."

Poulain heaved a sigh.

"There! there!" continued Chicot, "I was saying that having just been working under the eyes of these personages, and not having been noticed by them, it was you who pretended this. I was saying, my dear monsieur, that it would be a great advantage for you to have another illustrious personage — the King, for instance — notice you."

"The King?"

"His Majesty, yes, Monsieur Poulain; he is very ready, I assure you, to admire all work and to reward every effort."

"Ah! Monsieur Briquet, for pity's sake!"

"I repeat, dear Monsieur Poulain, that if you stir you are a dead man; keep calm, therefore, to avoid this disgrace."

"But what do you want of me, in Heaven's name?"

"Your welfare, nothing else; have I not told you that I am your friend?"

"Monsieur!" cried Nicholas Poulain in despair, "I do not know, truly, what wrong I am doing his Majesty, you, or any one else in the world!"

"Dear Monsieur Poulain, you will explain yourself to whom it may concern; that is not my affair. I have my ideas, you see, and I hold to them; these ideas are that the King would not approve of the fact that his lieutenant of the provostship, when he is carrying out his duties as overseer, obeys the gestures and indications of Monsieur de Mayneville; who knows, for that matter, if the King would not take it ill that his lieutenant of the provostship had omitted to state in his daily report that Madame de Montpensier and Monsieur de Mayneville entered his good city of Paris yesterday morning? Nothing but that, mark you, Monsieur Poulain, might embroil you with his Majesty."

"Monsieur Briquet, an omission is not a crime, and surely his Majesty is too enlightened" —

"Dear Monsieur Poulain, you imagine things; I see more clearly into this affair."

"What do you see?"

"A fine and convenient gallows" —

"Monsieur Briquet!"

"Listen then, the devil! — with a new rope, four soldiers on the four cardinal points, not a few Parisians around the gallows, and a certain lieutenant of the provostship of my acquaintance at the end of the rope."

Nicholas Poulain shook so that he made the whole hedge tremble.

"Monsieur!" cried he, clasping his hands.

"But I am your friend, dear Monsieur Poulain," continued Chicot, "and in this capacity of friend, here is some advice for you."

"Some advice?"

"Yes, very easy to follow, thank God! You will go from here, — from here, you understand, — and find" —

"And find" — interrupted Nicholas, full of agony, "and find whom?"

"Let me think a moment," said Chicot, "and find — Monsieur d'Épernon."

"Monsieur d'Épernon, the King's friend?"

"Exactly; you will take him aside."

"Monsieur d'Épernon?"

"Yes, and you will tell him all about the measuring of the road."

"Is this madness, monsieur?"

"It is wisdom, on the contrary, supreme wisdom."

"I do not understand."

"It is clear, nevertheless. If I denounce you purely and simply as the man who was measuring, or the man with the cuirasses, they will hang you; if, on the contrary, you carry this out with good grace, they will cover you with rewards and honors. You do not seem convinced! Well, that will give me the trouble of returning to the Louvre; but faith, I will go, notwithstanding; there is nothing I would not do for you."

And Nicholas Poulain heard the noise which Chicot made in moving the branches in order to rise.

"No, no," said he; "stay here; I will go."

"Very well! But you understand, dear Monsieur Poulain,

no subterfuges, for to-morrow I shall send a note to the King, whose intimate friend I have the honor to be, such as you see me, or rather such as you do not see me; so that although not until the day after to-morrow, you will be hanged just as high and more quickly."

"I will go, monsieur," said the terrified lieutenant; "but you strangely abuse" —

"I?"

"Oh!"

"Well, dear Monsieur Poulain, raise altars to me; you were a traitor five minutes ago. I make you the savior of your country. By the way, run quickly, dear Monsieur Poulain, for I am in great haste to leave here; yet I cannot do so until you have left. Hôtel d'Épernon; do not forget."

Nicholas Poulain rose and with the face of a desperate man shot like an arrow in the direction of the Porte Saint Antoine.

"Ah! it was time," said Chicot, "for there is some one coming out of the priory. But it is not my young Jacques. Well! well!" said Chicot, "who is this fellow, cut out as the architect of Alexander would have designed Mount Athos. *Ventre de biche!* he is a very big dog to accompany a poor cur like me!"

And seeing this emissary of the prior, Chicot hastened to the Croix Faubin, the place of rendezvous.

As he was forced to go by a roundabout road, the direct line had an advantage over him in rapidity, that is to say the giant monk, who went over the road with great strides, arrived first at the cross.

Chicot, moreover lost a little time, as he went along, in examining his man, whose physiognomy he did not recognize in the least.

In fact, the monk was a veritable Philistine.

In the haste he had made to reach Chicot, his Jacobin gown had not even been fastened, and through an opening his muscular limbs were seen, dressed up in the trunk-hose of a layman. His hood, which had fallen back, showed a head of hair over which the scissors of the priory had not yet passed.

Moreover, a certain expression other than religious contracted the deep corners of his mouth, and when he wished to pass from a smile to a laugh, he showed three teeth which seemed like palisades planted behind the rampart of his heavy lips.

Arms as long as those of Chicot, but thicker, shoulders

capable of raising the gates of Gaza, a great kitchen knife passed through the cord around his waist; such, with a bag rolled like a buckler across his breast, were the arms, offensive and defensive, of this Goliath of the Jacobins.

"He is decidedly ugly," said Chicot, "and if he does not bring me excellent news, with a head like that, I shall find that such a creature is totally useless on earth."

The monk, seeing Chicot approach, saluted him in almost a military fashion.

"What do you wish, my friend," said Chicot.

"You are Monsieur Robert Briquet?"

"In person."

"In that case, I have a letter for you from the reverend prior."

"Give it to me."

Chicot took the letter; it was couched in the following terms:

"*My dear friend: I have carefully reflected since our separation. It is impossible to let the lamb whom the Lord has entrusted to me go among the devouring wolves of the world. I mean to refer, you will understand, to our little Jacques Clément, who has just been received by the King, and who has perfectly acquitted himself of your message.*

"*Instead of Jacques, whose age is still tender, and who owes his services to the priory, I send you a good and worthy brother of our community; his manners are gentle and his disposition simple; I am sure you will be pleased with your travelling companion.*"

"Yes, yes," thought Chicot, casting a side glance at the monk, "count on that."

"*I add to this letter my benediction, which I regret I did not give you by word of mouth.*

"*Adieu, dear friend.*"

"That is fine handwriting!" said Chicot, when he had finished reading. "I would wager that the letter was written by the treasurer; he writes a superb hand."

"It was indeed Brother Borromée who wrote the letter," said the Goliath.

"Well, in that case, my friend," replied Chicot, smiling pleasantly at the big monk, "you must return to the priory."

"I?"

"Yes, and you will say to his reverence that I have changed my mind, and that I desire to travel alone."

"What! you will not take me, monsieur ?" said the monk, with a surprise which was not free from menace.

"No, my friend, no."

"And why not, if you please ?"

"Because I have to be economical; times are hard and you would eat enormously."

The giant showed his three defenses.

"Jacques eats as much as I do," said he.

"Yes, but Jacques is a monk," said Chicot.

"And what am I, then ?"

"You, my friend, are a foot-soldier or a gendarme, which fact, between you and me, might scandalize the Notre Dame to which I am sent."

"Why do you speak of foot-soldier and gendarme ?" replied the monk. "I am a Jacobin. Cannot my gown be recognized ?"

"It is not the cowl that makes the friar, my friend," replied Chicot; "but the knife makes the soldier. Say that to Brother Borromée, if you please."

And Chicot bowed to the giant, who made his way back to the priory, growling like a hunted dog.

As to our traveller, he let him who was to have been his companion disappear, and when he saw him swallowed up within the great door of the convent, he hid behind a hedge, took off his doublet, and put on the fine shirt of mail under his linen shirt.

His toilet completed, he cut across the fields to reach the road to Charenton.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DE GUISES.

The evening of the day on which Chicot set out for Navarre, we again find in the great chamber of the Hôtel de Guise, into which, in the preceding pages, we have already more than once conducted our readers, we again find, we say, in the great chamber of the Hôtel de Guise, that short young man with the bright eyes whom we saw enter Paris riding behind Carmainges, and who was no other, as we already know, than the beautiful penitent of Dom Gorenflot.

This time she had taken no precaution to disguise either her person or her sex.

Madame de Montpensier, dressed in an elegant robe, with spreading collar, her hair glittering with star-shaped gems, as was the fashion of that time, stood in the embrasure of a window, impatiently waiting for some one who had been delayed in coming.

Darkness was beginning to gather; the duchess could only with great difficulty distinguish the door of the hôtel, on which her eyes were intently fixed.

At length a horse's hoofs were heard, and ten minutes later the voice of the usher mysteriously announced to the duchess Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne.

Madame de Montpensier rose and ran to her brother in such haste that she forgot to walk on the tip of her right foot, as was her habit when she did not wish to limp.

"Alone, brother," said she; "you are alone?"

"Yes, sister," said the duke, seating himself after having kissed the hand of the duchess.

"But Henry, where is Henry? Do you realize that every one expects him here?"

"Henry, my sister, has nothing further to do in Paris, while on the contrary he still has everything to do in the towns of Flanders and Picardy. Our work is slow and underground; we have work there; why should we leave this work to come to Paris, where everything is done?"

"Yes, but where everything will be undone if you do not hasten."

"Bah!"

"'Bah!' as much as you wish, brother; I tell you that the bourgeois are no longer satisfied with all these reasons; they want to see their Duke Henry; that is their wish, their great desire."

"They shall see him at the right time. Has not Mayneville explained all this to them?"

"Without doubt; but you know his voice is not worth what yours is."

"Let us come to the most pressing business, sister. And Salcède?"

"Dead."

"Without speaking?"

"Without breathing a word."

"Good. And the preparations for war?"

"Finished."

"Paris?"

"Divided into sixteen quarters."

"And each quarter has the chief we appointed?"

"Yes."

"Let us live in peace, then. *Pâque Dieu!* that is what I am going to say to our good bourgeois."

"They will not listen to you."

"Bah!"

"I tell you they are possessed."

"Sister, you are somewhat too much in the habit of judging the impatience of others by your own."

"Are you reproaching me seriously for this?"

"God forbid! but what my brother Henry says must be done. And my brother Henry does not wish us to hurry."

"What shall we do, then," asked the duchess, impatiently.

"Does anything require haste, sister?"

"Everything, if we wish it."

"Beginning with what, in your opinion?"

"By taking the King."

"That is your fixed idea. I do not say it is bad, if we can carry it out; but to plan and to do are not the same; remember how many times we have been disappointed already."

"Times are changed; the King no longer has any one to defend him."

"No, except the Swiss, the Scotch, and the French guards."

"Brother, when you wish, I myself will show him to you on the road, escorted merely by two lackeys."

"I have been told that a hundred times, and I have never seen it once."

"You will see it, then, if you will only stay three days in Paris."

"Another project!"

"A plan, you mean."

"Kindly communicate it to me, in that case."

"Oh! it is a woman's idea, and consequently it will make you laugh."

"God forbid that I should wound your pride as an inventor! Let us hear the plan."

"Are you making fun of me, Mayenne?"

"No, I am listening to you."

"Well! in four months" —

Just then the usher raised the curtain.

"Will it please your highnesses to receive Monsieur de Mayneville?" he asked.

"My accomplice," said the duchess; "let him enter."

Monsieur de Mayneville came in, and kissed the hand of the Duke de Mayenne.

"One word, my lord," said he; "I come from the Louvre."

"Well?" cried Mayenne and the duchess together.

"They suspect your arrival."

"How?"

"While I was speaking with the chief of the post of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, two Gascons passed."

"Did you know them?"

"No; they were all newly gotten up. '*Cap de Bious!*' said one, 'you have on a doublet which is magnificent, but, if the opportunity arises, it will not be of as much use to you as your cuirass of yesterday.'

"'Bah! bah! solid as is Monsieur de Mayenne's sword,' said the other, 'I will wager that it will cut no deeper into this satin than it would into the cuirass.'

"Thereupon the Gascon poured forth bravadoes which showed that they knew you were near."

"And to whom did these Gascons belong?"

"I know nothing about them."

"And they withdrew?"

"Oh! not at all! They spoke in a loud voice; the name of your highness was heard. Some passers-by stopped and asked if you had really arrived. They were about to reply to the question, when suddenly a man approached the Gascon and touched him on the shoulder. Either I am greatly mistaken, my lord, or this man was De Loignac."

"Well?" asked the duchess.

"To a few words uttered in a low tone, the Gascon replied merely by a gesture of submission, and followed the man who had interrupted him."

"So that" —

"So that I was unable to hear more; but meanwhile, be careful."

"Did you not follow them?"

"Yes; but at a distance. I was afraid of being recognized

as a gentleman of your highness. They set out in the direction of the Louvre, and disappeared behind the Hôtel des Meubles. But after them a whole train of voices repeated, 'Mayenne! Mayenne!'"

"I have a very simple way of answering," said the duke.

"What is it?" said his sister.

"To go and pay my respects to the King this evening."

"Pay your respects to the King?"

"Certainly. I come to Paris; I bring him news of his good towns in Picardy; there is nothing in it to rouse comment."

"The idea is good," said De Mayneville.

"It is imprudent," said the duchess.

"It is indispensable, sister, if they they really suspect my arrival in Paris. It was, moreover, the opinion of our brother Henry that I should go booted to the Louvre, in order to present to the King the respects of the whole family. This duty once done, I am free, and I can receive whoever seems fit to me."

"The members of the committee, for instance; they expect you."

"I will receive them at the Hôtel Saint Denis, on my return from the Louvre," said Mayenne. "So, De Mayneville, have my horse brought to me, just as it is, without being rubbed down. You will come with me to the Louvre. You, sister, will wait for me, if you please."

"Here, brother?"

"No, at the Hôtel Saint Denis, where I have left my horses and carriages, and where they think I am sleeping. We shall be there in two hours."

CHAPTER XXVII.

AT THE LOUVRE.

On that day also it happened that the King came out of his cabinet and sent for Monsieur d'Épernon. It was about noon.

The duke hastened to obey, and presented himself before the King. He found his Majesty standing in an antechamber, gazing attentively at a Jacobin monk who was blushing and dropping his eyes under the searching look of the King.

The latter took D'Épernon aside.

"Look, duke," said he, pointing to the young man, "what a comical-looking monk is here!"

"What is your Majesty surprised at?" said D'Épernon. "I find him very ordinary looking, myself."

"Really?"

And the King began to reflect.

"What is your name?" said he to the monk.

"Brother Jacques, sire."

"You have no other name?"

"My family name, 'Clement.'"

"Brother Jacques Clement," repeated the King.

"Does not your Majesty find something strange in the name?" said the duke, laughing.

The King did not answer.

"You have performed your commission very well," said he to the monk, without taking his eyes from him.

"What commission, sire?" asked the duke with that boldness for which he was reproached, and which daily familiarity gave him.

"Nothing," said the King, "a little secret between myself and some one whom you do not know, or rather whom you no longer know."

"Really, sire," said D'Épernon, "you look at this child very strangely, and you embarrass him."

"Yes, that is true. I do not know why I cannot keep my eyes from him; it seems to me that I have already seen him, or that I shall see him. He has come to me in a dream, I believe. Well, what nonsense I am talking! Go, little monk, you have done your mission. We will send the letter to him who asks for it; be easy, D'Épernon!"

"Sire?"

"Have ten crowns given him."

"Thank you," said the monk.

"One would say that you said 'thank you' on the edge of your teeth," remarked D'Épernon, who did not understand how a monk could despise ten crowns.

"I did say 'thank you' that way," replied young Jacques, "because I would much prefer one of those beautiful Spanish knives hanging over there on the wall."

"What! you would not rather have money so that you could go and see the players at the fair Saint Laurent, or the rabbits in the Rue Sainte Marguerite?" demanded D'Épernon.

"I have taken the vows of poverty and chastity," replied Jacques.

"Give him one of those Spanish blades and let him go, La Valette," said the King.

The duke, like a parsimonious man, chose from among the knives the one which seemed to him the least costly, and handed it to the young monk.

It was a small Catalonian knife, with a broad blade, solidly set in a handle of beautiful carved horn.

Jacques took it, thoroughly delighted at possessing such a beautiful weapon, and withdrew.

When he was gone the duke again tried to question the King.

"Duke," interrupted the latter, "have you among your Forty-Five two or three men who understand riding?"

"A dozen at least, sire, and all will be horsemen in a month."

"Choose two of them, and send them to me at once."

The duke bowed, went out, and sent for De Loignac to come into the antechamber.

De Loignac appeared at the end of a few seconds.

"De Loignac," said the duke, "send me two good horsemen at once; they are to carry out a mission of his Majesty."

De Loignac quickly crossed the gallery and reached the building which hereafter we shall call the lodging of the Forty-Five. Opening the door, he called in the voice of a commander:

"Monsieur de Carmainges! Monsieur de Biran!"

"Monsieur de Biran has gone out," said the sentry.

"What! gone out without permission?"

"He is watching the quarter which my lord the Duke d'Épernon recommended to him this morning."

"Very good! Call Monsieur de Sainte Maline, then."

The two names resounded through the arches, and the two chosen men at once appeared.

"Gentlemen," said De Loignac, "follow me to Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon."

And he led them to the duke, who, in turn, dismissed De Loignac and conducted them to the King. Upon a sign from his Majesty, the duke retired, and the two young men remained.

It was the first time they had been in the presence of the King. Henry was very imposing in appearance.

Their emotion showed itself in different ways.

Sainte Maline had bright eyes, strained muscles, and a bristling mustache. Carmainges, pale but resolute, although less proud, did not dare to fix his eyes on Henry.

"You belong to my Forty-Five, gentlemen?" said the King.

"I have that honor, sire," replied Sainte Maline.

"And you, monsieur?"

"I thought that monsieur was answering for both of us, sire; that is why my reply was so slow in coming; but as to being in your Majesty's service, I am in it as much as any one in the world."

"Good, you will mount your horses and take the road to Tours; do you know it?"

"I will ask where it is," said Sainte Maline.

"I will find where it is," said Carmainges.

"In order to guide you the better, pass first through Charenton."

"Yes, sire."

"You will keep on until you meet a man travelling alone."

"Will your Majesty describe him to us?" asked Sainte Maline.

"A long sword at his side or on his back, long arms and legs."

"May we know his name, sire?" asked Ernauton de Carmainges, whose companion's example led him, in spite of etiquette, to question the King.

"He calls himself the Shade," said Henry.

"We will ask the name of every traveller we meet, sire."

"And we will search every inn."

"Once this man is met and recognized, you will give him this letter."

The two young men extended their hands at the same time.

The King paused, embarrassed for a moment.

"What is your name?" he asked the one.

"Ernauton de Carmainges," he replied.

"And yours?"

"René de Sainte Maline."

"Monsieur de Carmainges, you will carry the letter, and Monsieur de Sainte Maline will deliver it."

Ernauton took the precious charge, which he prepared to insert in his doublet.

Sainte Maline arrested his arm just as the letter was about to

disappear, and respectfully kissed the seal. Then he returned the letter to Ernauton.

This flattery made Henry III. smile.

"Well, well, gentlemen," said he, "I see that I shall be well served."

"Is this all, sire?" asked Ernauton.

"Yes, gentlemen; but a last recommendation."

The young men bowed and waited.

"This letter, gentlemen," said Henry, "is more precious than life. So do not lose it, but give it secretly to the Shade, who will return a receipt for it which you will bring back to me, and above all else, ride like men who are travelling on their own business. Now go."

The two young men left the royal cabinet, Ernauton filled with joy, Sainte Maline bursting with jealousy; one with fire in his eyes, the other with a hungry look which burned into the doublet of his companion.

Monsieur d'Épernon was waiting for them, and tried to question them.

"Monsieur le Duc," replied Ernauton, "the King has not authorized us to speak."

They went at once to the stables, where the King's groom gave them two travelling horses, strong and well equipped.

Monsieur d'Épernon would certainly have followed them to find out more had he not been informed, just as Carmainges and Sainte Maline left him, that a man wished to speak to him at once and at any cost.

"What man?" asked the duke, impatiently.

"The lieutenant of the provostship of the Isle of France."

"Well! *parfandious!*" cried he, "am I sheriff, provost, or captain of the night watch?"

"No, my lord; but you are a friend of the King," replied an humble voice at his left side. "I beg you, in this capacity, to listen to me."

The duke turned.

Near him, hat in hand, with head bent, was a poor solicitor whose face every instant assumed one of the colors of the rainbow.

"Who are you?" demanded the duke, roughly.

"Nicholas Poulain, at your service, my lord."

"You wish to speak to me?"

"I beg that favor."

"I have not the time."

"Not even to hear a secret, my lord?"

"I hear a hundred of them every day, monsieur; yours would be the hundred and first; it would be one too many."

"Even if it concerned his Majesty's life?" said Nicholas Poulain, leaning toward D'Épernon's ear.

"Oh! ah! I will hear you; come into my study."

Nicholas Poulain wiped his forehead, which was dripping with perspiration, and followed the duke.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE REVELATION.

In crossing his antechamber, Monsieur D'Épernon spoke to one of the gentlemen who stood there.

"What is your name, monsieur?" he asked of an unknown face.

"Pertinax de Montcrabeau, my lord," replied the gentleman.

"Well, Monsieur de Montcrabeau, take your stand outside my door, and let no one enter."

"Yes, Monsieur le Duc."

"No one, you understand."

"Perfectly."

And Monsieur Pertinax, who was sumptuously arrayed, and who looked fine in orange-colored hose and a blue satin doublet, obeyed D'Épernon's order. He leaned against the wall, and took his position with folded arms in front of the portière.

Nicholas Poulain followed the duke, who passed into his study. He saw the door open and close, then the portière was drawn, and he began to tremble in good earnest.

"Now for your conspiracy, monsieur," said the duke, dryly; "but for Heaven's sake, let it be a good one, for I have a number of pleasant things to attend to to-day, and if I waste my time listening to you, beware!"

"Well, Monsieur le Duc," said Nicholas Poulain, "it is simply a question of the most frightful of crimes."

"Well, let us hear the crime."

"Monsieur le Duc" —

"They are going to kill me, are they not?" interrupted D'Épernon, straightening himself like a Spartan. "Well, so be it! my life is God's and the King's; let them take it."

"It does not concern you, my lord."

"Ah! that surprises me."

"It concerns the King. They are going to abduct him, Monsieur le Duc."

"Oh! still that old question of abduction!" said D'Épernon with scorn.

"This time the affair is very serious, Monsieur le Duc, if appearances are to be believed."

"And what day are they planning to abduct his Majesty?"

"My lord, the first time his Majesty goes to Vincennes in his litter."

"How will they abduct him?"

"By killing his two attendants."

"And who will strike the blow?"

"Madame de Montpensier."

D'Épernon began to laugh.

"That poor duchess!" said he. "What things they attribute to her!"

"Fewer than she plans, my lord."

"And she is planning this at Soissons?"

"Madame la Duchess is in Paris."

"In Paris?"

"I can answer for it, my lord."

"You have seen her?"

"Yes."

"That is to say, you thought you saw her."

"I have had the honor of speaking to her."

"The honor?"

"I made a mistake, Monsieur le Duc, — the misfortune."

"But my dear lieutenant of the provostship, it is not the duchess who is to abduct the King?"

"Pardon me, my lord."

"She herself?"

"In person, with her confederates, of course."

"And where is she to station herself in order to preside at this abduction?"

"At a window of the Jacobin Priory, which is, as you know, on the road to Vincennes."

"What the devil are you telling me?"

"The truth, my lord. All measures are taken to stop the litter the moment it reaches the walls of the convent."

"And who has taken these measures?"

"Alas!"

"Finish, now; the devil!"

"I, my lord."

D'Épernon sprang back.

"You?" said he.

Poulain heaved a sigh.

"You are connected with it, you who denounce?" continued D'Épernon.

"My lord," said Poulain, "a good servant of the King should risk everything in his service."

"In fact, by Heaven, you risk the rope!"

"I prefer death to disgrace, or to the death of the King, that is why I have come."

"Those are laudable sentiments, monsieur, and you must have good reasons for them."

"I thought, my lord, that you were the friend of the King, that you would not betray m , and that you might turn to profit the revelation I have just made."

The duke looked at Poulain for some time, and carefully scrutinized the lineaments of his pale face.

"There must be something else still," said he; "the duchess, resolute as she is, would not dare to attempt such an undertaking alone."

"She is expecting her brother," replied Nicholas Poulain.

"Duke Henry!" cried D'Épernon, with the terror which one might feel at the approach of a lion.

"Not Duke Henry, my lord, but the Duke de Mayenne."

"Ah!" said D'Épernon, breathing again; "but no matter, we must look into all these fine plans."

"Without doubt, my lord," said Poulain, "and it is for this reason that I have hastened."

"If you have told the truth, monsieur lieutenant, you shall be rewarded."

"Why should I lie, my lord? What would be my reason, I who eat the King's bread? Do I, or do I not owe him my services? I will go to the King, then, I warn you, if you do not believe me, and I will die, if I must, to prove my words."

"No! *parfandious!* you will not go to the King; do you

hear, Monsieur Nicholas? and it is with me alone that you must discuss this affair."

"So be it, my lord; I said that only because you seemed to hesitate."

"No, I do not hesitate, and in the first place, here are a thousand crowns I owe you."

"My lord desires, then, that this be for himself alone?"

"Yes, I have ambition, zeal, and I will keep the secret for myself. You will yield it to me, will you not?"

"Yes, my lord."

"With guarantee that it is a real secret?"

"Oh! with every guarantee."

"A thousand crowns are yours, then, without counting the future."

"I have a family, my lord."

"Well! but a thousand crowns, *parfandious!*"

"And if it was known in Lorraine that I made such a revelation, every word that I uttered would cost me a pint of blood."

"Poor dear man!"

"It is necessary, in case of misfortune, that my family be able to live."

"Well?"

"Well! that is why I accept the thousand crowns."

"To the devil with your explanation! What difference does your motive for accepting them make to me, as long as you do not refuse them? The thousand crowns, then, are yours."

"Thank you, my lord."

Seeing the duke approach a coffer into which he put his hand, Poulain advanced behind him. But the duke contented himself with drawing out a little book in which he wrote in a large and frightful hand:

"Three thousand pounds to Monsieur Nicholas Poulain."

So that one did not know whether he had given the three thousand pounds or whether he owed them.

"It is just as though you had it," said he.

Poulain, who had advanced his arm and leg, drew them back, a movement which caused him to bow.

"So it is settled?" said the duke.

"What is settled, my lord?"

"You will continue to inform me?"

Poulain hesitated; it was the duties of spy which were imposed on him.

"Well!" said the duke, "has this supreme devotion already vanished?"

"No, my lord."

"I may count on you, then?"

Poulain made an effort.

"You may count on me," said he.

"And I alone am to know all this?"

"You alone, yes, my lord."

"Well, my friend, go; *parfandious!* let Monsieur de Mayenne look to himself."

He uttered these words as he raised the portière to let Poulain pass; then, when he had seen the latter cross the room and disappear, he went at once to the King.

The latter wearied with playing with his dogs, had turned to cup and ball.

D'Épernon assumed a busy, anxious look, which the King, preoccupied with so important a work, did not even notice.

But, as the duke remained obstinately silent, the King raised his head and looked at him an instant.

"Well!" said he, "what is the matter now, La Valette? Are you dead?"

"Would to Heaven, sire!" replied D'Épernon, "I did not see what I do see."

"What? my cup and ball?"

"Sire, in great dangers a subject may be alarmed for the safety of his master."

"Dangers again? The black devil take you, duke!"

And with remarkable dexterity the King caught the ball on the small end of his cup.

"You are ignorant, then, of what is taking place?" asked the duke.

"In faith! perhaps," said the King.

"Your most cruel enemies surround you at this moment, sire."

"Bah! who, then?"

"The Duchess of Montpensier, first."

"Ah! yes, that is true; she watched Salcède being quartered yesterday."

"How your Majesty says that!"

"What is it to me?"

"You knew it, then?"

"You see very well that I knew it, since I told you of it."

"But that Monsieur de Mayenne would arrive — did you know that too?"

"Since last evening."

"What! this secret" — said the duke, unpleasantly surprised.

"Are there any secrets for the King, my dear fellow?" said Henry, carelessly.

"But who could have informed you?"

"Do you not know that we princes have revelations?"

"Or a police."

"It is the same thing."

"Ah! your Majesty has your police, and you say nothing about it!" replied D'Épernon, hurt.

"By Heaven! who will love me, then, if I do not love myself?"

"You do me an injustice, sire."

"If you are zealous, my dear La Valette, which is a fine quality, you are slow, which is a bad fault; your news would have been very good at four o'clock yesterday, but to-day" —

"Well, sire, to-day?"

"It comes a little late, you will admit."

"It is still too soon, sire, since I do not find you disposed to listen to me," said D'Épernon.

"I? I have been listening to you for an hour."

"What! you are menaced, attacked; they lay snares for you, and you do not stir?"

"Why should I, since you have given me a guard, and since yesterday you pretended that my immortality was assured? You contract your brow; ah! but have your Forty-Five returned to Gascony, where they no longer are of use? Is it with these gentlemen as with mules? — the day they are tried they are all fire; when they are bought they balk?"

"Well, your Majesty shall see what they are."

"I shall not be sorry to do so; will it be soon, duke, that I shall see this?"

"Sooner than you think, perhaps, sire."

"Good! you are going to frighten me."

"You shall see, you shall see, sire. By the way, when are you going to the country?"

"To the forest?"

"Yes."

"Saturday."

"In three days, then?"

"In three days."

"That is all, sire."

D'Épernon bowed to the King and withdrew.

In the antechamber he found that he had forgotten to relieve Monsieur Pertinax from his duty; but Monsieur Pertinax had relieved himself.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TWO FRIENDS.

Now, if it is agreeable to the reader, we will follow the two young men whom the King, delighted to have his little secrets to himself, had sent as messengers to Chicot.

Scarcely were they in the saddles, when Ernauton and Sainte Maline, in order not to let one get ahead of the other, almost crushed each other in passing through the gates.

In fact as the two horses went forward, they rubbed the knees of the two riders one against the other.

Sainte Maline's face became purple, Ernauton's pale.

"You are hurting me, monsieur!" cried the former, when they had passed the gates; "do you want to crush me?"

"You are hurting me also," said Ernauton, "but I do not complain."

"You wish to give me a lesson, I presume?"

"I wish to give you nothing at all."

"Ah!" said Sainte Maline, urging forward his horse, in order to speak nearer to his companion, "repeat those words to me."

"Why?"

"Because I do not understand you."

"You are seeking a quarrel, are you not?" said Ernauton, phlegmatically; "so much the worse for you!"

"And for what purpose should I seek a quarrel with you? Do I know you?" replied Sainte Maline, scornfully.

"You know me perfectly well, monsieur," said Ernauton. "In the first place, because in the town we come from, my house is two leagues from yours, and because, being of ancient

stock, I am well known in the country; then, because you are furious at seeing me in Paris, when you thought that you alone were summoned; finally, because the King gave me his letter to carry."

"Well! so be it!" cried Sainte Maline, white with rage. "I accept all that as truth. But one thing results from it" —

"What?"

"That I do not like to be near you."

"Go away if you wish; by Heaven! I am not detaining you."

"You act as though you did not understand me."

"On the contrary, monsieur, I understand you perfectly. You would rather like to take the letter and carry it yourself; unfortunately, it would be necessary to kill me for that."

"Who told you that I did not wish to do so?"

"To wish and to do are two very different things."

"Just descend with me to the border of the waters, and you shall see that with me to wish and to do are one and the same."

"My dear monsieur, when the King gives me a letter to carry" —

"Well?"

"Well! I carry it."

"I will take it from you by force, coxcomb that you are!"

"You will not put me, I trust, to the necessity of breaking your head, like that of a mad dog?"

"You?"

"Without doubt; I have a large pistol, and you have none."

"Ah! I will pay you for that!" said Sainte Maline, making his horse plunge.

"I trust so, after my commission is carried out."

"*Schelm!*"

"For the present be careful how you act, I beg you, Monsieur de Sainte Maline; for we have the honor of belonging to the King, and we should give a bad idea of the house by stirring up the people. And then think what a triumph for the enemies of his Majesty, in seeing discord among the defenders of the throne!"

Sainte Maline bit his fingers; the blood flowed beneath his furious teeth.

"There! there! monsieur," said Ernauton, "keep your hands to hold the sword, when we shall have come to that."

"Oh, I shall burst!" cried Sainte Maline.

"In that case the work will be done for me," said Ernauton.

We do not know to what point the ever-increasing fury of Sainte Maline might have reached, when suddenly Ernauton, crossing the Rue Saint Antoine, near Saint Paul, saw a litter, gave a cry of surprise, and halted to look at a woman half veiled.

"My page of yesterday!" he murmured.

The lady did not seem to recognize him, but throwing herself back in her litter, passed without moving a muscle.

"By Heaven! you make me wait for you, I think," said Sainte Maline, "and in order to stare at a woman!"

"I beg your pardon, monsieur," said Ernauton, resuming his course.

The young men, from that moment, followed at a good trot the Rue of the Faubourg Saint Marceau; they spoke no more, not even to quarrel.

Sainte Maline seemed calm enough outwardly, but in reality every muscle of his body still quivered with anger.

Besides, he had recognized, and this discovery had in no wise softened him, as one may easily understand, he had recognized that, good horseman as he was, he could not in the present instance even follow Ernauton, his horse being greatly inferior to that of his companion, and already wet with perspiration although he had ridden at a moderate pace.

This thought engrossed him; also, in order to make himself positively certain of what his mount could do, he began to torment him with switch and spur.

This persistence led to a quarrel between him and his horse.

This took place in the environs of the Bièvre.

The beast did not put himself to the expense of talking, as Ernauton had done; but, remembering his origin (he was Norman), he brought an action against his rider which the latter lost.

He started out by swerving to one side, then he reared, leaped forward, and started toward the Bièvre, where he rid himself of his rider by rolling with him as far as the river, where they separated.

One might have heard the curses of Sainte Maline a mile away, although they were partly stifled by the water.

When he had succeeded in getting on to his feet again, his eyes were starting from his head, and a few drops of blood, coming from his bruised forehead, trickled down his face.

Sainte Maline glanced around him; his horse had already ascended the hill, and nothing was to be seen but his buttocks, which showed that his head was already set in the direction of the Louvre.

Bruised as he was, covered with mud, drenched to the skin, and all bloody and sore, Sainte Maline understood the impossibility of catching his beast; even to attempt it was absurd.

It was then that the words he had spoken to Ernauton came back to his mind; if he had not been willing to wait one second for his companion in the Rue Sainte Maline, why should his companion have the kindness to wait for him one or two hours on the road?

This reflection brought Sainte Maline from anger to the most violent despair, especially when from the depths of his situation he saw the silent Ernauton spurring forward his horse, and turning aside to some road which no doubt he thought the shortest. With really irascible men, the culminating point of anger is a passing act of folly.

Some reach only delirium.

Others, the total prostration of strength and intellect.

Sainte Maline mechanically drew out his dagger; for an instant he had an idea of plunging it into his breast up to the guard.

What he suffered in that moment none could say, not even himself.

One dies in such a crisis, or, if one conquers it, one grows ten years older.

He climbed up the bank of the river again, helping himself by his hands and knees, until he reached the summit; once there, his wandering eye looked up and down the road; nothing was to be seen.

To the right, Ernauton had disappeared; in the distance his own horse had disappeared also.

While Sainte Maline was revolving in his exasperated mind a thousand sinister thoughts against others as well as himself, the gallop of a horse fell on his ear, and he saw a horse and rider issuing from the road to the right, which was the one chosen by Ernauton.

The rider was leading another horse.

It was the result of Monsieur de Carmainges' chase; he had cut across to the right, realizing that to pursue a horse was to double his activity by fright.

He had therefore made a detour, and cut off the passage of the Norman, by waiting for him across a narrow street.

At sight of this, the heart of Sainte Maline overflowed with joy; he felt a thrill of effusion and gratitude which gave a kindly expression to his face, then suddenly his features clouded; he understood all the superiority of Ernauton over himself, for he admitted to himself that, in his companion's place, he would not even have thought of doing as he had done. The nobleness of the act overwhelmed him; he felt it in order to measure it, and suffer from it. He stammered a few words of thanks to which Ernauton paid no attention, seized furiously the bridle of his horse, and, in spite of his condition, sprang into the saddle.

Ernauton, without uttering a single word, had gone on ahead of him, caressing his own horse. Sainte Maline, as we have said, was an excellent rider. The accident of which he had been the victim was a surprise; at the end of an instant's struggle in which this time he had the advantage, he became master of his beast, and started him on a trot.

"Thank you, monsieur," said he a second time to Ernauton, after having a hundred times consulted his pride and good manners.

Ernauton contented himself on his part with bowing, and touching his hat with his hand. The road seemed long to Sainte Maline.

Towards half-past two or thereabouts, they perceived a man walking along, followed by a dog; he was tall, with a sword at his side; it was not Chicot, but he had arms and legs worthy of him.

Sainte Maline, still completely covered with mud, could not contain himself; he saw that Ernauton was passing by without paying the least attention to this man.

The idea of finding his companion at fault passed like an evil thought through the mind of the Gascon; he approached the man and addressed him:

"Traveller," said he, "are you not expecting something?"

The traveller looked at Sainte Maline, whose appearance at that moment, it must be admitted, was not prepossessing.

With features still distorted from his recent anger, some partly dried mud on his clothes and partly dried blood on his cheeks, his great black frowning eyebrows, a nervous hand extended towards him, with a threatening rather than a

questioning gesture, — all this seemed foreboding to the pedestrian.

"If I expected anything," said he, "it is not anybody; and if I expected anybody, that anybody is not you, you may be sure."

"You are very impolite, my master!" said Sainte Maline, delighted at last at having found an opportunity of giving rein to his anger, and furious, besides, at seeing, by having made the mistake, that he had given a new triumph to his adversary.

As he spoke he raised his hand, which held the whip, to strike the traveller; but the latter raised his stick and dealt a blow on Sainte Maline's shoulder; then he whistled to his dog, who sprang at the horse's withers and at the man's thigh, and took from each a strip of flesh and a bit of cloth.

The horse, irritated by the pain, sprang forward a second time, it is true, and without Sainte Maline's being able to restrain him, but in spite of every effort on the part of the horse, the rider kept his seat.

Thus carried away he sped by Ernauton, who saw him pass without even smiling at his mishap.

When he had succeeded in calming his horse, when Monsieur de Carmainges had rejoined him, his pride began, not to diminish, but to lead him to a settlement.

"Well! well!" said he, forcing himself to smile, "this is my unlucky day, it seems. But the man very much resembled the description his Majesty gave us of the one we are looking for."

Ernauton was silent.

"I am speaking to you, monsieur," said Sainte Maline, exasperated at this indifference, which he rightly regarded as a proof of scorn, and which he wished to bring to an end by some definite clap, should it cost him his life, "I am speaking to you. Do you not hear?"

"The man his Majesty described to us," replied Ernauton, "had no stick and no dog."

"That is true," replied Sainte Maline, "and had I reflected I should have had one blow the less on my shoulder and two teeth marks less on my thigh; it is good to be careful and calm, I see."

Ernauton did not reply, but rising in his stirrups and placing his hand over his eyes for a screen:

"There," said he, "is the man we are looking for, and who is expecting us."

"Plague on it! monsieur," said Sainte Maline, in a hollow voice, jealous of this new advantage of his companion, "you have good eyesight. I can distinguish nothing but a black speck, and scarcely that."

Ernauton, without replying, continued to advance; soon Sainte Maline, in turn, could see and recognize the man described by the King. An evil impulse seized him; he urged forward his horse in order to arrive first.

Ernauton had expected this, and looked at him without a threat and without apparent intention; this glance brought Sainte Maline back to himself, and he walked his horse.

CHAPTER XXX.

SAINTE MALINE.

Ernauton was not mistaken; the man pointed out was indeed Chicot.

He, on his part, had good eyes and ears; he had seen and heard the horsemen from afar.

He suspected that they were coming to him, so he waited for them.

When there was no further doubt in this respect, and when he saw that the riders were coming towards him, he placed his hand without affectation on the handle of his sword, as if to assume a noble attitude.

Ernauton and Sainte Maline looked at each other an instant, both silent.

"It is for you to speak, monsieur, if you really wish it," said Ernauton, bowing to his adversary; for under these circumstances, the word "adversary" is more suitable than "companion."

Sainte Maline felt suffocated; his surprise at this courtesy choked him; he replied merely by bowing his head.

Ernauton saw that he remained silent, and therefore spoke.

"Monsieur," said he to Chicot, "monsieur and I are your servants."

Chicot bowed with his most gracious smile.

"Would it be indiscreet," continued the young man, "to ask you your name?"

"I am called the Shade, monsieur," replied Chicot.

"You are expecting something?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You will be so good, will you not, as to tell us what you expect?"

"I am expecting a letter."

"You understand our curiosity, monsieur, and there is nothing in it to offend you."

Chicot still bowed, with a smile more and more gracious.

"From what quarter do you expect this letter?" continued Ernauton.

"From the Louvre."

"Sealed with what seal?"

"With the royal seal."

Ernauton put his hand to his breast.

"You would recognize the letter, no doubt?" said he.

"Yes; if I saw it."

Ernauton drew the letter from his breast.

"That is it," said Chicot, "and as greater security, you know, do you not, that I am to give you something in return?"

"A receipt?"

"That is it."

"Monsieur," replied Ernauton, "I was charged by the King to carry this letter to you; but it is this gentleman who was appointed to hand it to you."

And he extended the letter to Sainte Maline, who took it and gave it into Chicot's hands.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said the latter.

"You see," added Ernauton, "that we have faithfully fulfilled our mission. There is no one on the road; no one therefore has seen us speak to you or give you the letter."

"That is so, monsieur. I recognize the fact, and I will testify to it, if necessary. Now it is my turn."

"The receipt," said both the young men.

"To which of you must I give it?"

"The King did not say!" cried Sainte Maline, looking at his companion threateningly.

"Make two receipts, monsieur," said Ernauton, "and give one to each of us; it is far from here to the Louvre, and some accident may happen on the way to monsieur or to me."

As he spoke, Ernauton's eyes flashed fire

"You are a wise man, monsieur," said Chicot to Ernauton.

And he drew some tablets from his pocket, tore two leaves from them, and wrote on each:

"Received from the hands of Monsieur René de Sainte Maline, the letter brought by Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges.

"THE SHADE."

"Adieu, monsieur," said Sainte Maline, taking his receipt.

"Adieu, monsieur, and a pleasant journey!" added Ernauton. "Have you anything else to send to the Louvre?"

"Absolutely nothing, gentlemen; many thanks," said Chicot.

Ernauton and Sainte Maline turned the heads of their horses toward Paris, and Chicot departed at a gait which the best mule would have envied.

When Chicot had disappeared, Ernauton, who had gone scarcely a hundred feet, pulled up his horse, and turned to Sainte Maline:

"Now, monsieur," said he, dismounting, "if you are ready?"

"Why so, monsieur?" said Sainte Maline in astonishment.

"Our mission is accomplished, and we have something to settle. The place seems to me excellent for a conversation like ours."

"As you will, monsieur," said Sainte Maline, dismounting, as his companion had already done.

Ernauton drew near and said to him:

"You know, monsieur, that without provocation on my part and without consideration on yours, without any cause, in fact, you have grievously offended me during the whole journey. More than this; you wished to compel me to fight at an inopportune moment, and I refused. But now the time is ripe, and I am your man."

Sainte Maline listened to these words with a gloomy face, and with frowning brows; but, strange fact, Sainte Maline was no longer filled with the anger which had driven him beyond all bounds! Sainte Maline no longer wished to fight; reflection had brought back common sense; he realized all the inferiority of his position.

"Monsieur," he replied, after an instant's silence, "when I insulted you, you replied by kindness; I do not now know how to use the language to you that I did a while ago."

Ernauton frowned.

"No, monsieur, but you still think what you said then."

"How do you know that?"

"Because all your words were dictated by hatred and envy, and because, in the two hours since you uttered them, this hatred and envy could not have been extinguished in your heart."

Sainte Maline blushed, but did not answer.

Ernauton waited an instant, and then said:

"If the King preferred me to you, it was because my face pleased him better than yours; if I was not hurled into the Bièvre, it was because I am a better rider than you; if I did not accept your challenge at the moment when it pleased you to make it, it was because I had more prudence; if I was not bitten by the man's dog, it was because I had more sagacity: in short, if I challenge you now to give me satisfaction and to fight, it is because I have more true honor, and, take care, if you hesitate, I shall say more courage."

Sainte Maline shivered, and his eyes shot fire; all the evil passions which Ernauton had mentioned had one by one left their mark on his livid face; at the last word of the young man he drew his sword in a towering rage.

Ernauton already had his weapon in his hand.

"Stay, monsieur," said Sainte Maline, "take back the last word you have spoken; it is too much, you will admit, you who know me perfectly, since, as you said, we live two leagues from each other. Take it back; you ought to be satisfied with my humiliation; do not dishonor me."

"Monsieur," said Ernauton, "as I never get angry, I never say anything except what I mean; consequently I shall take nothing at all back. I am sensitive myself, also, and new at court; therefore, I do not wish to have to blush every time I meet you. A stroke of the sword, if you please, monsieur; it is for my satisfaction as much as for yours."

"Oh, monsieur! I have fought eleven times," said Sainte Maline, with a gloomy smile, "and of my eleven adversaries two are dead. You know that, I presume."

"And I, monsieur, have never fought," replied Ernauton, "for an opportunity has never presented itself; I find one to my liking coming to me without my seeking, and I am going to make the most of it. I await your pleasure, monsieur."

"Hold," said Sainte Maline, shaking his head, "we are

countrymen, we are in the service of the King; let us not quarrel any more; I look upon you as a brave man, I would even offer you my hand, if that were not almost impossible. What would you have? I show myself to you as I am, embittered to the depths of my heart; but it is not my fault. I am envious, what would you have me do? Nature created me on an evil day. Monsieur de Chalabre, Monsieur de Montcrabeau, or Monsieur de Pincornay would not have been angry at me; it is your superiority which causes my vexation; console yourself for it, since my envy cannot injure you, and to my great regret your superiority remains. So we will stop here, shall we not, monsieur? I should suffer too much, in truth, if you were to tell of the cause of our quarrel."

"No one shall know of our quarrel, monsieur."

"No one?"

"No, monsieur. In the meantime, if we fight I will kill you or be killed myself. I am not one of those who hold life lightly; on the contrary, I cling to it. I am twenty-three years old; of a good name; I am not entirely poor; I trust in myself and in the future, and you may be sure I will defend myself like a lion."

"Well! it is entirely different with me, monsieur: I am already thirty years old and am disgusted with life, for I believe neither in the future nor in myself; but thoroughly disgusted with life, thoroughly incredulous of happiness as I am, I prefer not to fight with you."

"Then you will apologize?" said Ernauton.

"No, I have done and said enough. If you are not satisfied, so much the better; in that case you will cease to be my superior."

"I must remind you, monsieur, that since both are Gascons, we cannot end a quarrel thus without exposing ourselves to laughter."

"That is exactly what I expect," said Sainte Maline.

"You expect?"

"A laugh. Oh! how happy I shall be when that happens."

"You refuse, then, to fight?"

"I do not wish to fight with you, be it understood."

"After having provoked me?"

"I admit it."

"But, in short, monsieur, if I lose patience and attack you?"

Sainte Maline wrung his hands convulsively.

"In that case," said he; "so much the better; I shall hurl my sword ten feet away."

"Take care, monsieur, for in that case I should not strike you with the point."

"Good, for then I should have cause to hate you, and I should hate you mortally; then some day, a day of weakness on your part, I should catch you as you have just done me, and in despair I would kill you."

Ernauton returned his sword to its sheath.

"You are a strange man," said he, "and I pity you from the depths of my heart."

"You pity me?"

"Yes, for you must suffer horribly."

"Horribly."

"You never love?"

"Never."

"But you have passions, at least?"

"One only."

"Jealousy, you told me."

"Yes, which makes me have all to an indescribable degree of shame and wretchedness: I adore a woman the moment she loves another; I love gold when it is another's hand that touches it; I am proud always by comparison; I drink to warm my anger, to make it sharp when it is not chronic, that is, to make it burst and burn like a thunder-bolt. Oh! yes, yes, you have said it, Monsieur de Carmainges, I am wretched."

"You have never tried to become good?" asked Ernauton.

"I have not succeeded."

"What do you hope for? What do you expect to do, then?"

"What does the poisonous plant do? It has flowers like the others, and some people know how to put them to good use. What do the bear and the bird of prey do? They bite; but certain breeders know how to train them for the chase; that is what I am, and what I shall probably be in the hands of Monsieur d'Épernon and Monsieur de Loignac, until the day when they shall say: This plant is harmful, let us pull it up; this beast is mad, let us kill it."

Ernauton became somewhat calm.

Sainte Maline was no longer an object of anger for him, but of study; he felt almost pity for this man whom circumstances had led to make such singular confessions.

"A great fortune — and having great qualities, you could make one — would cure you," said he; "develop yourself in the direction of your instincts, Monsieur de Sainte Maline, and you will succeed in war or intrigue; then, being able to dominate, you will hate less."

"As high as I might rise, as deeply as I might take root, there would always be greater fortunes above me, which would wound me; below me, sardonic laughter, which would rend my ears."

"I pity you," repeated Ernauton. And this was all.

Ernauton went to his horse, which he had tied to a tree, unfastened him, and sprang into the saddle.

Sainte Maline had not dropped the bridle of his horse.

Both set out on the way back to Paris, the one silent and gloomy from what he had heard, the other from what he had said. Suddenly Ernauton extended his hand to Sainte Maline.

"Should you like me to try and cure you?" said he. "Come!"

"Not another word, monsieur," said Sainte Maline; "no, do not attempt that, you would fail in it. Hate me, on the contrary, and this will be a reason for my admiring you."

"Again I pity you, monsieur," said Ernauton.

One hour later the two horsemen entered the Louvre, and set out towards the lodging of the Forty-Five.

The King had gone out, and was not to return until evening.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOW MONSIEUR DE LOIGNAC MADE A SPEECH TO THE FORTY-FIVE.

Each of the young men took his stand at the window of his little lodge, to watch for the return of the King.

Each of them settled himself there with very different thoughts:

Sainte Maline full of hatred, full of shame, full of ambition, with frowning brow, and burning heart.

Ernauton already forgetful of what had taken place, absorbed in one thing, that is, who that woman could be who had

entered Paris in the costume of a page, and whom he had seen again in a sumptuous litter.

There was in this ample material for reflection for a heart more disposed to amorous adventures than to the calculations of ambition.

So Ernauton, little by little, lost himself in his reflections, and so deeply that it was only on raising his head that he perceived that Sainte Maline was no longer there.

A thought flashed through his mind.

Less absorbed than himself, Sainte Maline had watched for the return of the King; the King had returned, and Sainte Maline was with him.

He rose hastily, crossed the gallery, and reached the King's apartments just as Sainte Maline was leaving them.

"See," said the latter, radiant, to Ernauton, "see what the King has given me."

And he showed him a gold chain.

"I congratulate you, monsieur," said Ernauton, without betraying the least emotion in his tone. And he in turn entered the King's room.

Sainte Maline expected some show of jealousy on the part of Monsieur de Carmainges. He stood, therefore, stupefied at this calmness, waiting for Ernauton to come out.

Ernauton remained about ten minutes with Henry; these ten minutes were centuries for Sainte Maline.

At last he came out. Sainte Maline was in the same place; with a rapid glance he looked at his companion, then his heart dilated. Ernauton brought nothing, at least nothing visible.

"And you?" asked Sainte Maline, following out his thought; "what did the King give you, monsieur?"

"His hand to kiss," replied Ernauton.

Sainte Maline clinched his chain between his hands so that he broke a link.

Both set out toward the lodging. Just as they entered the apartment the trumpet sounded; at this signal each of the Forty-Five left his lodging like bees from their hives.

Each one wondered what new thing had happened, while taking advantage of this instant of general reunion to admire the change which had taken place in the person and the clothes of his companions.

The most of them were arrayed with great luxury, in bad

taste, perhaps, but the elegance of which was compensated for by its magnificence.

Moreover, they had what had been sought for by D'Épernon, who was a rather clever politician, although a poor soldier; some had youth, some vigor, others experience, and this made up among all for at least one defect.

In short, they resembled a corps of officers in citizens' clothing, the military cut being, with very few exceptions, what they had most desired.

Thus, with long swords, clanking spurs, mustaches curled to the point of heart-breaking, boots and gloves of buck or leather; the whole well gilded, well pomaded, or well be-ribboned *for appearance's sake*, as they said at that time, such was the instinctive bearing adopted by the greater number.

The most discreet were recognized by their sombre colors; the most penurious by solid stuffs; the most frisky by laces and rose-colored or white satin.

Perducas de Pincornay had found at some Jew's a brass chain, as thick as a prison chain.

Pertinax de Montcrabeau wore only bows and embroideries; he had bought his costume from a merchant in the Rue des Haudriettes, who had cared for a gentleman wounded by robbers.

The gentleman had ordered other clothes brought from his home, and, grateful for the kindness received, he had left the merchant his coat. Although somewhat soiled with mud and blood, the merchant had had it cleaned, and it had turned out very presentable. Two holes remained, it is true, marks of the dagger, but Pertinax had these two places embroidered over in gold; so a defect was replaced by an ornament.

Eustache de Miradoux did not shine; he had been obliged to dress Lardille, Militor, and the two children.

Lardille had chosen a costume as rich as the sumptuary laws permitted women to wear at that time; Militor was covered with velvet and damask, ornamented with a silver chain, a plumed toque, and embroidered hose; so that there remained to poor Eustache a sum barely sufficient to keep him from appearing in rags. Monsieur de Chalabre had kept his iron-gray doublet, which a tailor had cleaned and re-lined. Some bands of velvet, skilfully stitched on here and there, gave a new set-off to this garment that could not be worn out.

Monsieur de Chalabre pretended that he had asked nothing better than to change the doublet, but that in spite of the most

minute search, it had been impossible to find better made or more useful cloth.

For the rest, he had gone to the expense of poppy-colored breeches, boots, cloak, and hat — the whole harmonious to the eye, as is always the case in the clothes of the penurious.

As to his arms, they were irreproachable; old soldier that he was, he had known how to find an excellent Spanish sword, a dagger of good make, and a perfect gorget. This was a saving of plaited collars and ruffs.

These gentlemen were admiring one another, therefore, when Monsieur De Loignac entered with frowning brow.

He had a circle formed, and took his stand in the middle of this circle with a countenance which announced nothing agreeable. It is useless to say that all eyes were fixed on the chief.

"Gentlemen," said he, "are you all here?"

"All!" replied forty-five voices in unison, which was full of promise for manœuvres to come.

"Gentlemen," continued De Loignac, "you have been sent here to serve as special guard for the King; it is an honorary title, but it demands a great deal."

De Loignac made a pause which was filled by a gentle murmur of satisfaction.

"But some of you seem to me not to have thoroughly understood your duties. I am going to recall them to you."

Each one listened; it was evident that they were anxious to know their duties, if not eager to fulfil them.

"You must not imagine, gentlemen, that the King enrolls you and pays you in order for you to act like fops, and to give here and there, at your caprice, bites and scratches; discipline is necessary, although it remains a secret, and you are a gathering of gentlemen who ought to be the most obedient and the most devoted in the kingdom."

The company did not breathe; in fact, it was easy to understand from the seriousness of the peroration that the conclusion would be serious.

"From to-day you will live in the intimacy of the Louvre, that is, in the very laboratory of the government: if you do not take part in all the deliberations, you will often be chosen to execute their purport; you are, therefore, like those officers who carry in themselves not only the responsibility of a secret, but the virtue of the executive power."

A second murmur of satisfaction ran along the ranks of the

Gascons; heads were seen to straighten themselves as if pride had raised these men several inches.

"Suppose, now," continued De Loignac, "that one of these officers, in whom sometimes reposes the safety of the state or the tranquillity of the crown, suppose, I say, that an officer betrays the secrets of the council or that a soldier charged with an order does not carry it out, you know he suffers death?"

"No doubt," replied several voices.

"Well! gentlemen," continued De Loignac in a terrible tone, "even to-day a measure of the King has been betrayed, and perhaps may have rendered impossible a measure which his Majesty wished to carry out."

Terror began to take the place of pride and admiration; the Forty-Five looked at one another in distrust and anxiety.

"Two of you gentlemen have been surprised on the street cackling like two old women and letting fall words so serious that each one of them may now strike a man and kill him."

Sainte Maline at once advanced to Monsieur de Loignac, and said to him:

"Monsieur, I believe I have the honor of speaking to you in the name of my comrades; it is necessary that you no longer let suspicion hover over all the servants of the King; speak quickly, if you please, that we may know how it is with us, and that the good may not be confounded with the bad."

"That is easy," replied De Loignac.

The attention increased.

"The King has received word to-day that one of his enemies, one of those very ones whom you are called on to fight, has arrived in Paris to brave him or conspire against him. The name of this enemy was uttered secretly, but was overheard by a sentinel, that is, by a man who should have been regarded as a wall, and who, like it, should have been deaf, mute, and immovable; but this same man, in the street, repeated the name of this enemy of the King with boasting and bragging which attracted the attention of the passers-by and caused a sort of commotion; I know it, for I was walking along the same road as this man, and heard everything with my own ears. I placed my hand on his shoulder to stop him, for at the rate he was going, with a few words more he would have compromised so many sacred interests that I should have been forced to plunge my dagger into him on the spot, if he had not become silent at my first warning."

At that moment Pertinax de Montcrabeau and Perducas de Pincornay turned pale and fell back upon each other almost fainting. Montcrabeau, swaying from side to side, strove to stammer some excuses.

As soon as the guilty ones were exposed from their actions, all eyes were turned towards them.

"Nothing can justify you, monsieur," said De Loignac to Montcrabeau; "if you were drunk, you should be punished for having drank; if you were only proud and boastful, you should still be punished."

There was a terrible silence.

Monsieur de Loignac, in beginning, it will be remembered, had announced a punishment which promised serious results.

"Consequently," continued De Loignac, "Monsieur de Montcrabeau, and you also, Monsieur de Pincornay, must be punished."

"Pardon, monsieur," replied Pertinax; "but we come from the provinces, we are new at court, and we are ignorant of the art of living in the midst of politics."

"This honor of being in his Majesty's service should not be accepted without weighing the duties of this service."

"We will in future be as mute as sepulchres; we swear it."

"All that is good, gentlemen; but can you repair to-morrow the wrong you have done to-day?"

"We will try."

"Impossible, I tell you, impossible!"

"But this once, monsieur, pardon us."

"You live," went on De Loignac, without directly replying to the prayer of the two culprits, "in apparent freedom, which I wish to repress by strict discipline. Do you thoroughly understand this, gentlemen? Those who find the conditions hard may leave; I shall not be embarrassed for volunteers to take their places."

No one answered, but many brows contracted.

"Consequently, gentlemen," continued De Loignac, "it is right that you should be forewarned of this: justice will be carried out among us secretly, expeditiously, without writing, without trial; traitors will be punished by death, and at once. There are all sorts of pretences for this, and no one will find anything in it to find fault with. Suppose, for instance, that Monsieur de Montcrabeau and Monsieur de Pincornay, instead of talking together in a friendly way in the street of things

which they should have forgotten, have had a disscusion concerning things which they had the right to remember; well, might not this discussion have led to a duel between Monsieur de Pincornay and Monsieur Montcrabeau? In a duel it sometimes happens that one lunges and is run through at the same time; the day after the dispute these two gentlemen are found dead at the Pré-aux-Clercs, as Messieurs de Quélus, de Schomberg, and de Maugiron were found dead at the Tournelles; the affair rouses the interest that a duel should, and that is all. I shall therefore order killed — you understand, do you not, gentlemen? — I shall therefore order killed, by a duel or otherwise, whoever betrays the secret of the King."

Montcrabeau fainted dead away, and leaned upon his companion, whose pallor became more and more livid and whose teeth were clinched ready to break.

"I shall have," went on De Loignac, "for less grave faults, less serious punishment, — the prison, for instance, — and I shall use it when it will more severely punish the culprit than deprive the King. To-day I spare the life of Monsieur de Montcrabeau, who has spoken, and Monsieur de Pincornay, who has listened; I pardon them, I say, because they may have made a mistake and because they were ignorant; I will not punish them with the prison because I may have need of them this evening or to-morrow; consequently I will keep the third punishment for them, which I mean to use against delinquents, — a fine."

At this word "fine" the face of Monsieur de Chalabre grew as long as a martin's.

"You have received a thousand pounds, gentlemen; you will return a hundred of them, and this money will be used by me to reward, according to their merits, those whom I have no cause to reproach."

"A hundred pounds!" murmured Pincornay; "but *Cap de Bious!* I no longer have them. I have spent them for my clothes."

"You can sell your chain," said De Loignac.

"I shall be very glad to give it up for the service of the King," replied Pincornay.

"No, monsieur; the King does not purchase the belongings of his subjects in order to pay their fines; sell it yourself, and pay yourself. I have a word to add," continued De Loignac. "I have noticed various kinds of irritation among different members of this company; every time that a difference arises I

want it submitted to me, and I alone shall have the right to judge of the seriousness of the trouble and to order a duel, if I find a duel necessary. One is often killed in duels in these days; it is the fashion, and I do not want my company, in order to follow the fashion, to be constantly depleted and inadequate. The first duel, the first challenge which takes place without my approval will be punished with rigorous imprisonment, a very heavy fine, or even with a severer punishment still if the case does great injury to the service. Let those who can apply these orders to themselves do so. Now go, gentlemen. By the way, fifteen of you will station yourselves this evening at the foot of his Majesty's staircase while he receives, and at the first sign you will scatter, if need be, to the antechambers; fifteen will stand outside, without ostensible purpose, and mingle in the train of those who come to the Louvre; lastly, the fifteen others will remain in the lodgings."

"Monsieur," said Sainte Maline, approaching, "permit me not to offer a suggestion, God forbid! but to ask for an explanation; every good troop needs to be well commanded. How shall we act in unison if we have no chief?"

"And what am I, then?" asked De Loignac.

"Monsieur, you are our general."

"No, not I, monsieur, you are mistaken, but Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon."

"You are our brigadier, then? In that case, it is not enough, monsieur; we need an officer for each squad of fifteen."

"That is so," replied De Loignac, "for I cannot every day divide myself into three parts; and yet I wish among you no other superiority than that of merit."

"Oh! as to that, monsieur, even should you deny it, it will show of its own accord, and from the individual work you will know the difference if there is none in the *ensemble*."

"I will institute temporary chiefs, then," said De Loignac, having pondered an instant over the words of Sainte Maline; "with the password I will give the name of the chief. In this way, each one in turn will learn to obey and command, for, as yet, I do not know the capability of any one; this capability must develop in order for me to make my choice. I will look around and judge."

Sainte Maline bowed and returned to the ranks.

"But you understand," went on De Loignac, "I have divided you into squads of fifteen; you know your numbers; the first

at the staircase, the second in the court, the third in the lodgings; the latter, partly dressed, the swords by the bed, that is, ready to march at the first signal. Now go, gentlemen. Monsieur de Montcrabeau and Monsieur de Pincornay, to-morrow the payment of your fine; I am treasurer; go."

All left. Ernauton de Carmainges alone remained.

"You desire something, monsieur?" said De Loignac.

"Yes, monsieur," said Ernauton, bowing; "it seems to me that you forgot to say what we were to do. To be in the service of the King is a glorious phrase, no doubt, but I greatly desire to know what this service involves."

"That, monsieur," replied De Loignac, "is a delicate question, and one which I cannot fully answer."

"Might I venture to inquire why, monsieur?"

All these words were addressed to Monsieur de Loignac with such exquisite politeness, that, contrary to his habit, the latter sought in vain for a severe reply.

"Because I myself am often ignorant in the morning of what I shall do in the evening."

"Monsieur," said Carmainges, "you hold such a high position with regard to us that you ought to know many things of which we are ignorant."

"Do as I do, Monsieur de Carmainges: learn these things without being told them; I will not prevent you."

"I appeal to your knowledge, monsieur," said Ernauton, "because having come to court without friendship or hatred, guided by no passion, I can, without being of more worth, be more useful to you than another."

"You have neither friendships nor hatreds?"

"No, monsieur."

"But, at least, you love the King, I presume?"

"I ought to and I wish to, Monsieur de Loignac, as a servant; as a servant and a gentleman."

"Well! that is one of the cardinal points by which you should be guided; if you are a clever man, it ought to help you to find the one who is against him."

"Very well, monsieur," replied Ernauton, bowing, "behold me determined; there still remains a point, however, about which I am greatly troubled."

"What is it, monsieur?"

"Passive obedience."

"It is the first condition."

"I understand perfectly, monsieur. Passive obedience is sometimes difficult for men sensitive as to honor."

"That does not concern me, Monsieur de Carmainges," said De Loignac.

"But, monsieur, when an order displeases you?"

"I read the signature of Monsieur d'Épernon, and that consoles me."

"And Monsieur d'Épernon?"

"Monsieur d'Épernon reads the signature of his Majesty, and consoles himself as I do."

"You are right, monsieur," said Ernauton, "and I am your humble servant."

Ernauton made a move to withdraw; it was De Loignac who detained him.

"But you have awakened in me certain ideas," said he, "and I will tell you something which I would not tell the others, because they have had neither the courage nor the courtesy to speak to me as you have done."

Ernauton bowed.

"Monsieur," said De Loignac, approaching the young man, "perhaps some great personage will arrive this evening; do not lose sight of him, but follow him wherever he goes, on leaving the Louvre."

"Monsieur, permit me to say to you that this would be spying."

"Spying! do you think so?" said De Loignac, coldly; "that is possible, but wait" —

He drew from his doublet a paper, which he held out to Carmainges; the latter unfolded it and read:

"Have Monsieur de Mayenne followed this evening, if he ventures, by chance, to present himself at the Louvre."

"Signed?" asked De Loignac.

"Signed 'D'Épernon,'" read Carmainges.

"Well, monsieur?"

"Well," replied Ernauton, bowing low; "I will follow Monsieur de Mayenne."

And he withdrew.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MESSIEURS THE BOURGEOIS OF PARIS.

Monsieur de Mayenne, with whom the Louvre was so much concerned, and who was so little aware of this, left the Hôtel de Guise by a rear door, and, booted and on horseback, as though he had just returned from travelling, presented himself at the Louvre with three attendants.

Monsieur d'Épernon, informed of his coming, had his visit announced to the King.

Monsieur de Loignac, warned on his part, had sent a second order to the Forty-Five; fifteen, therefore, were to post themselves, as had been arranged, in the antechambers, fifteen in the court, and fourteen in the lodgings. We say fourteen, because Ernauton, as we know, having received a special mission, was not with his companions.

But as the following of Monsieur de Mayenne was not of a nature to inspire fear, the second squad received orders to return to the barracks.

Monsieur de Mayenne, admitted to his Majesty, made him a respectful visit, which the King received with a pretence of affection.

"Well, cousin," said the King to him, "you have come to pay Paris a visit?"

"Yes, sire," said Mayenne; "I thought I ought to come in my brother's name and my own, to remind your Majesty that you have no more faithful subjects than ourselves."

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Henry, "the fact is so well known, that, apart from the pleasure that you know a visit from you gives me, you might, in truth, have saved yourself this little trip. There surely must have been some other motive for it?"

"Sire, I feared that your good will towards the house of De Guise might be altered by the singular reports which for some time our enemies have been circulating."

"What reports?" asked the King, with the good nature which made him so dangerous to the most intimate.

"What!" demanded Mayenne, somewhat disconcerted, "your Majesty has heard nothing which might prove unfavorable to us?"

"Cousin," said the King, "know once for all that I would not permit any one here to speak ill of the De Guises; and as they know this better than you seem to know it, they do not speak of it, duke."

"Then, sire," said Mayenne, "I do not regret having come, since I have had the pleasure of seeing my King and of finding him of such a mind; but I will admit that my haste was useless."

"Oh! duke, Paris is a good city, from which there is always something to be obtained," said the King.

"Yes, sire, but we have our affairs at Soissons."

"Which ones, duke?"

"Those of your Majesty, sire."

"That is true, that is true, Mayenne; continue, therefore, to attend to them as you have begun; I know how to appreciate and reward, as the conduct of my subjects deserves."

The duke withdrew, smiling.

The King reëntered his chamber, rubbing his hands.

De Loignac made a sign to Ernauton, who said a word to his valet and set out to follow the four horsemen.

The valet ran to the stable, and Ernauton followed on foot. There was no danger of losing Monsieur de Mayenne; the indiscretion of Perducas de Pincornay had made known the arrival in Paris of a prince of the house of De Guise. At this news, the good Leaguers had begun to come from their houses and to dog his footsteps.

Mayenne was not hard to recognize with his broad shoulders, his rounded figure, and his pointed beard, as the *Étoile* said.

They followed him therefore to the gates of the Louvre, and there the same companions waited until he came out to accompany him to the doors of his hôtel.

In vain Mayneville scattered the most zealous, by saying to them:

"Not so much ardor, my friends, not so much ardor; good God! you will compromise us."

The duke had an escort of no less than two or three hundred men when he arrived at the Hôtel Saint Denis, which he had chosen as his quarters.

This made it very easy for Ernauton to follow him without being noticed.

Just as the duke entered, and turned around to bow, he thought he recognized one of the gentlemen who bowed at

the same time as the cavalier who had accompanied the page whom he had helped to pass into the city through the Porte Saint Antoine, and who had shown such strange interest in the execution of Salcède.

Almost at the same instant, and just as Mayenne had disappeared, a litter cut through the crowd. Mayneville went to meet it; one of the curtains was drawn back, and, thanks to a ray of moonlight, Ernauton thought he recognized in his page the lady of the Porte Saint Antoine.

Mayneville and the lady exchanged a few words; the litter disappeared under the porch of the hôtel; Mayneville followed the litter and the door closed.

An instant later Mayneville appeared on the balcony, thanked the Parisians in the name of the duke, and as it was growing late, invited them to return to their houses in order that evil tongues might not take advantage of their assembling.

Every one departed at this suggestion, with the exception of ten men who had entered in the suite of the duke.

Ernauton withdrew like the others, or rather, while the others were leaving, he pretended to withdraw. The ten elect who remained to the exclusion of all the others were deputies from the League, sent to Monsieur de Mayenne to thank him for having come, and at the same time to implore him to persuade his brother to come.

In fact, these worthy bourgeois, of whom we already caught a glimpse the evening of the sale of the cuirasses, who were not lacking in imagination, had formulated in their preparatory meetings a number of plans which lacked only the sanction and support of a chief on whom they could rely.

Bussy Leclerc announced that he had exercised three convents in the handling of arms, and enrolled five hundred bourgeois, that is to say, he had put in the state of being unattached an effective force of a thousand men.

Lachapelle Marteau had conversed with the magistrates, the clerks, and all the people of the palace. He could offer both counsel and action; represent the counsel by two hundred black robes, the action by two hundred police officers.

Brigard had the merchants of the Rue des Lombards, the pillars of the market-places, and of the Rue Saint Denis.

Crucé shared the lawyers with Lachapelle Marteau, and disposed, besides, of the University of Paris.

Delbar offered all the bargemen and the people of the wharves, a dangerous lot, forming a contingent of five hundred men.

Louchard disposed of five hundred horse jockeys and horse dealers, mad Catholics.

A pewterer named Pollard and a pork-butcher named Gilbert presented fifteen hundred butchers and pork-butchers from the city and the suburbs.

Maître Nicholas Poulain, Chicot's friend, offered everything and everybody.

When the duke, securely shut up in a safe chamber, had heard these disclosures and offers:

"I admire the strength of the League," said he, "but the object at which, no doubt, it aims, I do not see."

Maître Lachapelle Marteau at once set out to make a discourse in three periods; he was very prolix, as was a well-known fact, and Mayenne shuddered.

"Let us make it short," said he. Bussy Leclerc interrupted Marteau.

"Well," said he, "we are hungry for a change; we are the strongest, and consequently we wish this change; this is short, clear, and precise."

"But," demanded Mayenne, "how will you go to work to effect this change?"

"It seems to me," said Bussy Leclerc, with that frankness of speech which in a man of such humble station in life as himself might be looked on as boldness, "it seems to me that, since the idea of the Union came from our chiefs, that it is for our chiefs and not for us to indicate the object."

"Gentlemen," replied Mayenne, "you are perfectly right; the object ought to be indicated by those who have the honor to be your chiefs; but this is the time to repeat to you that the general should be the judge of the moment to engage in battle, and that even though he has seen his troops ranged, armed, and animated, he gives the signal to charge only when he thinks right to do so."

"But, indeed, my lord," said Crucé, "the League is in a hurry; we have already had the honor of telling you so."

"In a hurry for what, Monsieur Crucé?" asked Mayenne.

"To arrive."

"At what?"

"At our object; we have our own plan also."

"Then it is different," said Mayenne, "if you have your plan, I have nothing further to say."

"Yes, my lord; but may we count on your help?"

"Without a doubt, if this plan pleases my brother and myself."

"It is probable, my lord, that it will please you."

"In that case, let us hear your plan."

The Leaguers looked at one another; two or three made a sign to Lachapelle Marteau to speak.

The latter advanced, and appeared to beg permission of the duke to explain himself.

"Speak," said the duke.

"This is it, my lord," said Marteau; "the idea came to Leclerc, Crucé, and myself; we thought about it, and it is probable that its result is assured."

"In point of fact, Marteau, in point of fact!"

"There are several quarters in the city which include among them all the forces of the city, the great and the small chatelet, the palace of the Temple, the Hôtel de Ville, the arsenal, and the Louvre."

"That is true," said the duke.

"All these points are protected by permanent garrisons, but are easy ones to overcome, because they cannot expect a sudden attack."

"I admit this, also," said the duke.

"But the city is further defended; first, by the captain of the night watch with his archers, who stroll through the places that are in danger, and are the real defense of Paris. This is what we have planned: to seize in his house the captain of the watch, who lives at the Couture Sainte Catherine. The attack could be made without noise, the place being deserted and isolated."

Mayenne shook his head.

"Deserted and isolated as it is," said he, "one does not break down a solid door and fire twenty shots without some noise."

"We have foreseen this objection, my lord," said Marteau; "one of the archers of the captain of the watch is with us. In the middle of the night, just two or three of us will knock on the door; the archer will open; he will go and inform the captain that his Majesty wishes to speak to him — there will be nothing strange in that; about once a month the King

sends to this officer for reports and despatches. The door thus opened, we will have ten men enter, bargemen who live in the Saint Paul quarter, and who will dispatch the captain of the watch."

"That is, they will cut his throat?"

"Yes, my lord. Thus the first orders of defense will be intercepted. It is true that other magistrates, other officers may be sent ahead by the trembling bourgeois or the politicians. There are Monsieur the President, Monsieur d'O, Monsieur de Chiverny, Monsieur the Procurer Laguesle; well! we will force their houses at the same time; Saint Bartholomew taught us how that was done, and we will treat them as we will have treated Monsieur the Captain of the Watch."

"Ah! ah!" said the duke, who found the affair serious.

"It will be an excellent chance, my lord, to fall upon the politicians, all designated in our quarters, and to make an end of the religious heretics and the political heretics."

"All this is very well, gentlemen," said Mayenne, "but you have not explained to me if you will also seize the Louvre at this time, a veritable stronghold, in which guards and gentlemen are constantly on the watch. The King, timid as he is, will not let his throat be cut like the captain of the watch; he will take his sword in hand, and, remember this, he is king; his presence will have great effect on the bourgeois, and you will be defeated."

"We have chosen four thousand men for this expedition to the Louvre, my lord, and four thousand men who are not fond enough of the Valois for his presence to produce on them the effect you mention."

"You think that will be sufficient?"

"Without doubt; we shall be ten to one," said Bussy-Leclerc.

"And the Swiss? there are four thousand of them, gentlemen."

"Yes, but they are at Laguy, and Laguy is eight leagues from Paris; so admitting that the King might be able to get word to them, it would take two hours for the messengers to make the trip on horseback, eight hours for the Swiss to make it on foot, that is, ten hours; and they would arrive just in time to be stopped at the gates; for in ten hours we shall be masters of the whole city."

"Well! so be it, I admit all that: the captain of the watch has his throat cut, the politicians are killed, the authorities of

the city have disappeared, every obstacle is overcome, in fact; you have no doubt agreed on what you will do then?"

"We shall organize a government of honest men, like ourselves," said Brigard, "and provided we succeed in our little trade, provided that we have bread assured to our children and our wives, we desire nothing more. A little ambition perhaps might make some of us wish to be tithing-men, local police officers, or commanders of a company of militia; well, Monsieur le Duc, we will be such, but that is all. You see that we are not exacting."

"Monsieur Brigard, you speak as well as possible! yes, you are honest, I well know, and you shall not suffer any mixture in your ranks."

"Oh! no! no!" cried several voices, "no dregs with good wine."

"Very good!" said the duke; "that is talking. Now let us see. Monsieur the Lieutenant of the Provostship, are there many loafers and good-for-nothing people in the Isle de France?"

Nicholas Poulain, who had not once put himself to the front, advanced as though in spite of himself.

"Yes, my lord," said he, "there are too many."

"Can you give us an idea of the number of this population?"

"Yes, approximately."

"Estimate, then, Maître Poulain."

Poulain began to count on his fingers:

"Robbers, three to four thousand; idlers and beggars, two thousand to two thousand five hundred; occasional thieves, fifteen hundred to two thousand; assassins, four to five hundred.

"Good! there, at a low estimate, are six thousand or six thousand five hundred scoundrels of the sack and cord. To what religion do these fellows belong?"

"Beg pardon, my lord?" asked Poulain.

"I ask whether they are Catholics or Huguenots."

Poulain began to laugh.

"They are of all religions, my lord," said he, "or rather of one alone, — their God is gold, and blood is their prophet."

"Well, so much for the religious religion, if one may so call it; and now, as to the political religion, what shall we say? Are they Valois, Leaguers, political zealots, or Navarrais?"

"They are bandits and plunderers."

"My lord, do not imagine," said Crucé, "that we shall ever take those people as allies."

"No, certainly I do not imagine it, Monsieur Crucé, and that is really what troubles me."

"And why should that trouble you, my lord," asked some members of the deputation in surprise.

"Ah! gentlemen, understand that it is because those men, who have no opinion, and who consequently do not fraternize with you, seeing that there are no longer magistrates in Paris, no longer public power, no longer royalty; in short, no longer anything which holds them in check, will set to work to plunder your shops while you wage war, and your homes while you occupy the Louvre; now they will side with the Swiss against you, now with you against the Swiss, so that they will always be the stronger."

"The devil!" said the deputies, looking at one another.

"I think it is serious enough to be thought of; is it not, gentlemen?" said the duke. "As to me, I will consider it, and I will try and find a means of overcoming this obstacle; for your interest before ours, is my brother's maxim and my own."

The deputies gave a murmur of approbation.

"Now, gentlemen, permit a man who has ridden twenty-four leagues on horseback night and day to sleep for a few hours; there is no danger in the lodgings for the present at least, while if you were to act, there would be; this is not your opinion, perhaps?"

"Oh! yes, Monsieur le Duc," said Brigard.

"Very good."

"We will take our very humble leave of you, then, my lord," continued Brigard, "and when you wish to appoint another meeting" —

"That shall be as soon as possible, gentlemen, you may be sure," said Mayenne; "to-morrow, perhaps, the day after at the latest."

And taking final leave of them, he left them thoroughly astonished at his foresight, which had discovered a danger of which they had not even dreamed.

Scarcely had he disappeared when a door hidden in the tapestry opened and a woman rushed into the room.

"The duchess!" cried the deputies.

"Yes, gentlemen!" she exclaimed, "and who comes to help you out of your difficulty."

The deputies, who knew her resolution, but who, at the same time, feared her enthusiasm, crowded around her.

"Gentlemen," continued the duchess, smiling, "what the Hebrews were unable to effect, Judith alone accomplished. Hope! I too have my plan."

And presenting to the Leaguers two white hands, which the most gallant kissed, she went away by the door which had already given exit to Mayenne.

"By Heaven," exclaimed Bussy Leclerc, biting his mustaches and following the duchess, "I decidedly think that she is the man of the family!"

"Oh!" murmured Nicholas Poulain, wiping the perspiration which had come out on his forehead at sight of Madame de Montpensier, "I should like to be out of all this."

PART II.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BROTHER BORROMÉE.

It was almost ten o'clock in the evening before the deputies began to return, very contrite, and at the corner of each street that was nearest to their individual houses parting from one another, in exchanging civilities. Nicholas Poulain, who lived the furthest away of all, walked on alone, reflecting deeply on the perplexing situation which had caused him to give utterance to the exclamation which ends the closing paragraph of our last chapter.

In short, the day had been full of events for every one and particularly for him. He was returning to his home, therefore, trembling at what he had just heard, and saying to himself that if the Shade had thought fit to drive him to a denunciation of the plot of Vincennes, Robert Briquet would never pardon him for not having revealed to Monsieur de Mayenne the plan so clearly explained by Lachapelle Marteau.

As he walked along, deep in his reflections, in the middle of the Rue de la Pierre-au-Réal, a sort of trench four feet wide, which led to the street Neuve Saint Méry, Nicholas Poulain saw a Jacobin monk, his robe tucked up to his knees, running towards him. He had to step aside, for two Christians could not pass abreast in this street.

Nicholas Poulain hoped that monachal humility would give way to him, a man of the sword; but it was not so; the monk ran like a startled deer, so swiftly that he would have knocked down a wall, and Nicholas Poulain, though swearing, had to step aside so as not to be knocked down. At once there began between them, in that tunnel lined with houses, the irritating evolution which takes place between two undecided men, both of whom wish to pass, who do not wish to embrace

each other, but who always find themselves thrown into each other's arms.

Poulain swore, the monk cursed, and the man of the gown, less patient than the man of the sword, seized the latter by the middle of his body to hurl him against the wall.

In this conflict, and just as they were on the point of pommelling each other, they recognized each other.

"Brother Borromée!" cried Poulain.

"Maître Nicholas Poulain!" exclaimed the monk.

"How do you do?" went on Poulain, with the admirable good nature and the unchangeable mildness of the Parisian bourgeois.

"Very poorly," replied the monk, much more difficult to calm than the layman, "for you have delayed me and I was in great haste."

"Devil of a man that you are!" replied Poulain; "always as belligerent as a Roman! But where in the devil are you running at this hour in such haste? Is the priory on fire?"

"No, but I was going to the duchess's to speak to Mayneville."

"To what duchess?"

"There is but one, it seems to me, at whose house one could speak to Mayneville," said Borromée, who at first had thought he could reply categorically to the lieutenant of the provostship, because this lieutenant might have him followed, but who nevertheless did not wish to be too communicative to the inquisitive man.

"Well," said Nicholas Poulain, "what were you going to do at Madame de Montpensier's?"

"Ah, my God! that is very simple," said Borromée, seeking for a specious reply; "our reverend prior was asked by Madame la Duchesse to become her confessor; he had consented, but a conscientious scruple seized him and he refused. The meeting was fixed for to-morrow; I must therefore, on the part of Dom Modeste Gorenflot, tell the duchess that she must no longer count on him."

"Very good; but you do not look as though you were going in the direction of the Hôtel de Guise, my very dear brother; I will even say that you are actually turning your back on it."

"That is so," replied Brother Borromée, "because I am coming from it."

"But where are you going, then?"

"They told me at the hôtel that Madame la Duchesse had gone to call on Monsieur de Mayenne, who arrived this evening, and who has taken rooms at the Hôtel Saint Denis."

"True again. In fact," said Poulain, "the duke is at the Hôtel Saint Denis, and the duchess is with the duke; but comrade, what is the use of playing the politician with me? It is not usually the treasurer who is sent to carry out the commissions of the convent."

"Where a princess is concerned, why not?"

"And you, the confidant of Mayneville, do not believe in the confessions of Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier?"

"What should I believe, then?"

"The devil! My dear fellow, you well know the distance from the priory to the middle of the road, since you had me measure it; take care! You tell me so little about it that I shall perhaps believe too much."

"And you will be wrong, dear Monsieur Poulain; I know nothing else. Now, do not detain me, I beg, for I shall not find Madame la Duchesse."

"You will always find her in her own house, to which she will return, and where you might have waited for her."

"Ah! well!" exclaimed Borromée, "I should not be sorry to see a little of Monsieur le Duc."

"Come, now."

"You know him; if once I let him go to his mistress, we cannot lay hands on him again."

"Ah! That is talking. Now that I know with whom you have business, I will leave you; adieu, and good luck to you!"

Borromée, seeing the way clear, in exchange for the good wishes given him threw a brisk good-night to Nicholas Poulain, and hurried down the open street.

"Well, well, there is always something new," said Nicholas Poulain to himself, as he watched the robe of the Jacobin growing fainter and fainter in the gloom; "but why in the devil do I need to know what is going on? Am I, perhaps, growing to like the trade which I am condemned to carry on? For shame!"

And he went to bed, not with the calmness of a quiet conscience, but with the peace which, in every position of the world, false as it may be, the support of one stronger than ourselves gives us.

In the meantime, Borromée continued on his way, with a speed which gave him the hope of making up lost time.

He knew, in fact, the habits of Monsieur de Mayenne, and in order to be well informed, no doubt, had reasons which he did not think necessary to relate minutely to Maître Nicholas Poulain.

Nevertheless, he reached the Hôtel Saint Denis, perspiring and out of breath, just as the duke and the duchess had finished talking over their affairs of importance and Monsieur de Mayenne was taking leave of his sister that he might be free to pay a visit to the lady of the Cité about whom we know that Joyeuse had cause to complain.

The brother and sister, after several remarks on the reception of the King, and the plan of the ten, had agreed upon the following facts:

The King had no suspicions, and was from day to day more easy to attack.

The important thing was to organize the League in the provinces of the north, while the King abandoned his brother and forgot Henry of Navarre.

Of these last two enemies, the Duc d'Anjou, with his dull ambition, was the only one to fear; as to Henry of Navarre, they knew of him from well-informed spies; he was engaged merely in making love to his three or four mistresses.

"Paris was in readiness," said Mayenne aloud; "but their alliance with the royal family gave strength to the politicians and the true royalists. They must wait for a rupture between the King and his allies; this rupture, with the fickleness of Henry, could not be slow in taking place. But, as nothing is pressing," continued Mayenne, "let us wait."

"I," said the duchess in a low tone, "I needed ten men scattered throughout the quarters of Paris to stir it up after the blow I meditate; I have found these ten men, I ask nothing more."

They were at this point, the one in his dialogue, the other in her asides, when Mayneville entered suddenly, announcing that Borromée wished to speak to Monsieur le Duc.

"Borromée!" said the duke in surprise, "who is he?"

"My lord, he is the one you sent to me from Nancy, when I asked your highness for a man of action and intelligence."

"I remember; I told you that I had both in one, and I

sent you Captain Borroville. Has he changed his name to Borromée?"

"Yes, my lord, his name and his uniform; he calls himself Borromée and is a Jacobin."

"Borroville a Jacobin?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And why is he a Jacobin? The devil would laugh heartily if he recognized him under his gown."

"Why is he a Jacobin?"

The duchess made a sign to Mayneville.

"You shall know later," continued the latter; "that is our secret, my lord; in the meantime, let us hear Captain Borroville or Brother Borromée as you please."

"Yes, especially as his visit disturbs me," said Madame de Montpensier.

"And me too, I admit," said Mayneville.

"Then introduce him without losing an instant," said the duchess.

As to the duke, he fluctuated between the desire to hear the messenger and the fear of missing the meeting with his mistress.

He glanced at the door and at the clock.

The door opened, and the clock struck eleven.

"Well, Borromée," said the duke, unable to keep from laughing, in spite of a little ill humor, "how you are disguised, my friend!"

"My lord," said the captain, "I am, indeed, very ill at ease under this devil of a robe; but what must be must be, as Monsieur de Guise, senior, used to say."

"It is not I, however, who have thrust you into this robe, Borroville," said the duke; "so do not bear me ill will on account of it, I beg you."

"No, my lord, it is Madame la Duchesse; but I bear her no grudge, since I am at her service."

"Many thanks, captain; and now let us see what you have to say to us so late?"

"That which, unfortunately, I could not tell you earlier, my lord, for I had the whole priory on my hands."

"Well! speak now."

"Monsieur le Duc," said Borroville, "the King is sending aid to the Duc d'Anjou."

"Bah!" said Mayenne, "we know that song; they have sung it for three years."

"Oh! yes; but this time, my lord, I give you the news for a certainty."

"Humph!" said Mayenne, with a toss of the head like that of a shying horse, "for a certainty?"

"This very day, that is, last night, at two o'clock in the morning, Monsieur de Joyeuse set out for Rouen. He starts by sea from Dieppe and carries three thousand men to Antwerp."

"Oh! oh!" said the duke, "and who told you that, Borroville?"

"A man who himself is leaving for Navarre, my lord."

"For Navarre! To Henry?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And on whose part is he going to Henry?"

"On the part of the King; yes, my lord, on the part of the King, and with a letter from the King."

"Who is this man?"

"He calls himself Robert Briquet."

"Well?"

"He is a great friend of Dom Gorenflot."

"A great friend of Dom Gorenflot?"

"They call each other thee and thou."

"An ambassador from the King?"

"Of this I am certain; he sent some one from the priory to the Louvre for a letter of credit. It was one of our monks who carried out the commission."

"And this monk?"

"Was our little soldier, Jacques Clement, the one you noticed, Madame la Duchesse."

"And he did not tell you what the letter contained?" said Mayenne; "the stupid!"

"My lord, the King did not give it to him; he had it carried to the messenger by servants of his own."

"We must have this letter, by Heaven!"

"Certainly we must have it," said the duchess.

"How is it that you did not think of that?" said Mayneville.

"I thought of it so much that I tried to send to the messenger, as travelling companion, one of my men, a Hercules; but Robert Briquet mistrusted him and sent him back."

"You must go yourself."

"Impossible."

"Why?"

"He knows me."

"As a monk, but not as a captain, I trust?"

"Faith, I know nothing about it; this Robert Briquet has a very searching eye."

"What kind of a man is he, then?" asked Mayenne.

"A tall, thin fellow, all nerve, all muscle, and all bone. clever, bantering, and taciturn."

"Ah! ah! and he handles the sword?"

"Like one who invented it, my lord."

"A long face?"

"My lord, he has every kind of face."

"A friend of the prior?"

"From the time when he was a simple monk."

"Oh! I have a suspicion," said Mayenne, frowning, "and I will enlighten myself."

"Do so quickly, my lord, for, formed as he is, this fellow must walk at a vigorous pace."

"Borroville," said Mayenne, "you will set out for Soissons, where my brother is."

"But the priory, my lord?"

"Are you so embarrassed," said Mayneville, "at making up a story for Dom Modeste, and does he not believe anything that you wish to make him believe?"

"You will say to Monsieur de Guise," continued Mayenne. "all that you know of the mission of Monsieur de Joyeuse."

"Yes, my lord."

"And Navarre that you are forgetting, Mayenne?" said the duchess.

"I am forgetting it so little that I will look after it myself," replied Mayenne. "Have them saddle a fresh horse for me. Mayneville." Then he added in a low tone:

"Can he be living still? Oh, yes, he must be living!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CHICOT, STUDENT OF LATIN.

After the departure of the young men, we may remember that Chicot set out with rapid steps.

But as soon as they had disappeared in the valley which forms the slope of the bridge of Juvisy sur l'Orge, Chicot, who, like Argus, seemed to have the privilege of seeing behind, and who no longer perceived either Ernauton or Sainte Maline, — Chicot stopped at the culminating point of the rising ground, examined the horizon, the ditches, the plain, the bushes, the river, everything, in short, to the dappled clouds which were sailing obliquely behind the great elms along the road; and sure of having seen no one who might trouble or spy on him, he seated himself on the other side of a ditch, his back against a tree, and began what he called his examination of conscience.

He had two purses of money, for he had perceived that the bag given him by Sainte Maline, besides the royal letter, contained certain round rolling objects which greatly resembled gold or silver money. The bag was a veritable royal purse, with two H's on it, one embroidered above, the other below.

"That is pretty," said Chicot, looking at the purse, "it is charming on the part of the King! His name, his arms! No one is more generous and more stupid! Decidedly, I shall never make anything of him. On my word of honor!" continued Chicot, "if one thing surprises me it is that this kind and good King did not at the same time have embroidered on the same purse the letter which he sends me to carry to his brother-in-law, and my receipt as well. Why trouble ourselves? All the political world is out in the open air to-day; let us talk politics like the rest of the world. Bah! if they should do a little assassinating to this poor Chicot, as they have already done to the courier which this same Henry sent to Rome, Monsieur de Joyeuse, it would be one enemy the less, that is all; and friends are so common at the present time that one can be prodigal of them. The Almighty chooses badly when he chooses! Now, let us see first what money there is in the purse; we will examine the letter afterwards. A hundred crowns! just the same amount that I borrowed from Gorenflot. Ah! pardon, let us not calumniate;

here is a little bag — of Spanish gold, five quadruples. Well! well! that is delicate; he is very thoughtful, Henriquet! Well! in truth, were it not for the letters and the fleur-de-lis, which seem to me superfluous, I would send him a big kiss. Now this purse troubles me; it seems to me that the birds, flying over my head, will take me for a royal emissary, and will make fun of me, or, what would be worse, will denounce me to the passers-by."

Chicot emptied his purse into the hollow of his hand, drew from his pocket Gorenflot's simple linen bag, and slipped into it the silver and gold crowns, saying to them:

"You may rest quietly together, my children, for you come from the same country."

Then, drawing in turn the letter from the bag, he put in its place a stone which he picked up, tied the string of the bag around the stone, and threw it, as a slinger does a pebble, into the Orge, which wound like a serpent below the bridge.

The water spurted up, two or three circles stirred the calm surface, and grew wider and wider until they broke against the banks.

"That for myself," said Chicot; "now we will work for Henry."

He took the letter, which he had laid on the ground in order the more easily to throw the purse into the river.

But there was coming along the road a donkey laden with wood. Two women were leading the donkey, which walked with a step as proud as if, instead of wood, he was carrying relics.

Chicot hid the letter in his large hand, which he leaned on the ground, and let them pass by. Once alone, he took the letter again, tore away the envelope, and broke the seal with the most imperturbable tranquillity, as though it were a question of a simple letter from a procurator.

Then he took the envelope, which he rolled between his two hands, and the seal, which he ground between two stones, and sent them both after the purse.

"Now," said Chicot, "let us look at the style."

And he opened the letter and read:

"Our very dear brother, the profound love which our very dear brother and deceased King Charles the Ninth bore you still lives under the arches of the Louvre and clings obstinately to my heart."

Chicot bowed.

"Therefore it is repugnant to me to talk to you on sad and grievous subjects; but you are strong in adverse fortune; so I no longer hesitate to communicate to you these facts which one says only to brave and tried friends."

Chicot interrupted himself and bowed again.

"Besides," he continued, "I have a royal interest in convincing you of this feeling; it is the honor of my name and of yours, my brother.

"We resemble each other on this point, that we are both surrounded by enemies. Chicot will explain it to you."

"*Chicotus explicabit!*" said Chicot, "or rather *evolvet*, which is infinitely more elegant."

"Your servant, Monsieur le Vicomte de Turenne, furnishes daily subject for scandal at your court. God forbid that I should interfere in your affairs, except for your happiness and honor! But your wife, whom to my great regret I call my sister, ought to have this care for you in my stead and place — which she has not."

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot, continuing his Latin translation, "*Quæque omittit facere.* That is hard."

"I therefore ask you, brother, to watch, so that the relations of Margot with the Vicomte de Turenne, strangely allied with our common friends, do not bring shame and injury to the house of Bourbon. Make an example as soon as you are sure of the fact, and make sure of the fact as soon as you have had Chicot explain my letter."

"*Statuis atque audiveris Chicotum litteras explicantem.* Let us continue," said Chicot.

"It would be grievous for the least suspicion to hover over the legitimacy of your inheritance, brother, a precious point of which God forbids me to think; for, alas! I am condemned in advance not to live again in my posterity.

"The two accomplices whom, as brother and King, I denounce to you meet the most of the time in a small château which is called Loignac. They choose the pretext of a chase; this château is, besides, a hot-bed of intrigues, to which the De Guises are not strangers; for you know, doubtless, my dear Henry, with what strange love my sister pursued Henry de Guise, and my own brother Monsieur d'Anjou, at the time I myself bore this name, and when he was called Duc d'Alençon."

"*Quo et quam irregulari amore sit prosecuta et Henricum Guisium et germanum meum,* et cetera."

"I embrace you, and recommend my suggestions to you, always ready, moreover, to aid you in everything and for everything. In the meantime, aid yourself by the advice of Chicot, whom I send to you."

"*Age, auctore Chicoto.* Good!"

"Behold me counsellor of the Kingdom of Navarre.

"Your affectionate," et cetera, et cetera.

Having read this, Chicot put his head between his hands.

"Oh!" said he, "this, it seems to me, is rather a bad commission, and which proves to me that in fleeing from one evil, as Horatius Flaccus says, one falls into a worse one. In truth, I prefer Mayenne. And yet, apart from that devil of an embroidered purse, for which I cannot forgive him, the letter is that of a clever man. In fact, supposing Henriot kneaded of the dough of which husbands are ordinarily made, this letter will embroil him at once with his wife, Turenne, Anjou, De Guise, and even with Spain. In order for Henry of Valois to be so well informed at the Louvre as to what is taking place with Henry of Navarre at Pau, there must be some spy there, and this spy will greatly puzzle Henriot. On the other hand, the letter will cause me much trouble if I meet a Spaniard, a Lorraine, a Béarnais, or a Fleming, curious enough to want to know for what I am sent to Béarn. But I would not be very far-sighted if I did not expect a meeting with some such curious person. Monsieur Borromée, especially, or I am greatly mistaken, is reserving something for me.

"Second point.

"What did Chicot seek, when he asked a mission of King Henry? Tranquillity was his object.

"But Chicot is going to embroil the King of Navarre with his wife. This is not Chicot's business, except that Chicot by embroiling among themselves such powerful personages is going to make mortal enemies for himself, who will prevent his reaching the happy limit of eighty years. Faith! so much the better, one lives well only while one is young. But then it would have been just as well to wait for the blow from Monsieur de Mayenne's knife.

"No, for reciprocity is necessary in everything; this is Chicot's motto. Chicot will therefore continue his journey. But Chicot is a man of intelligence, and will take precautions. Consequently he will have with him nothing but money, so that if they kill Chicot they injure only him. Chicot, there-

fore, will put the finishing touch to what he has begun that is, he will translate this beautiful epistle, from beginning to end, into Latin, and will impress it on his memory, whereon already two-thirds of it are engraved; then he will buy a horse, because, really, from Juvisy to Pau it is necessary to put the right foot before the left too many times. But before doing all these things Chicot will tear the letter from his friend Henry of Valois into an infinite number of little pieces, and he will take particular care that these little pieces, reduced to the state of atoms, shall go, some into the Orge, some into the air, and the remainder he will entrust to the earth, our common mother, to whose breast everything returns, even the foolishness of kings. When Chicot shall have finished what he has begun" — and Chicot interrupted himself to carry out his plan of division. A third of the letter, therefore, went by water, another third by the air, and the last third disappeared in a hole dug for this purpose with an instrument which was neither dagger nor knife, but which, if need be, could take the place of either, and which Chicot wore at his belt.

"Chicot will resume his journey with the most minute precautions, and he will dine in the good city of Corbeil, like the honest fellow that he is. Meanwhile," continued Chicot, "let us occupy ourselves with the Latin theme which we have decided to compose. I believe we shall prepare a rather pretty morsel."

Suddenly Chicot stopped; he perceived that he could not translate into Latin the word Louvre; this greatly troubled him.

He was likewise forced to change the word Margot into *Margota*, as he had already changed Chicot into *Chicotus*, whereas, to speak correctly, he must have translated Chicot into *Chicôt* and Margot into *Margôt*, which was not Latin, but Greek. As to Margarita, he did not think of it; the translation in his opinion would not have been exact.

All this Latin, with the search for purism and the Ciceronian turn, brought Chicot as far as Corbeil, a pleasant city, where the bold messenger paid little heed to the wonders of Saint Spire, and a great deal to a keeper of a cook-shop, who perfumed with his appetizing odors the vicinity of the cathedral. We will not describe the feast he had; we will not try to depict the horse he bought in the stable of the inn — this would be imposing too rigorous a task on us: we will

merely say that the repast was of sufficient length and the horse poor enough to furnish us, if we were not over-scrupulous, with material for almost a volume.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE FOUR WINDS.

Chicot, with his little horse, which must have been a very good one to carry so great a personage, having slept at Fontainebleau, made a turn to the right, the following day, and pushed on as far as a small village named Orgeval. He would gladly have ridden a few leagues more that day, for he seemed anxious to get away from Paris, but his mount began to stumble so frequently and so badly that he thought it imperative to halt.

Besides, his eyes, usually so practised, had not succeeded in perceiving anything on the road.

Men, wagons, and bars had appeared to him perfectly inoffensive. But Chicot, safe, at least apparently, did not on that account live in security; no one, indeed, as our readers must know, believed less and trusted less in appearances than Chicot.

Therefore, before making his horse and himself ready for the night, he examined the whole house with great care.

They showed Chicot elegant rooms with three or four doors; but according to his ideas, not only did the rooms have too many doors, but these doors did not close easily enough, either.

The host had just had a large closet repaired without other exit than a door on the stairway; this door was furnished with formidable bolts on the inside.

Chicot had a bed put up for himself in this closet, which at first glance he preferred to the magnificent rooms without means of fortification which had been shown him.

He turned the locks in their staples, and satisfied that their working was both firm and easy, he had his supper laid in his room, forbade them to take away the table, under the pretence that he sometimes was hungry during the night, supped, undressed, placed his clothes on a chair, and went to bed.

But before doing so, as a greater precaution, he drew from

his pocket the purse or rather the bag of crowns and placed it under the pillow with his good sword.

Then he went over the letter three times in his mind.

The table furnished him a second buttress, and yet this double rampart did not seem to him sufficient; he rose, took a clothes-press between both arms, and placed it across the doorway, which it hermetically sealed.

He had therefore between himself and all possible aggression a door, a wardrobe, and a table. The inn had seemed to Chicot almost uninhabited; the host had a frank countenance. That night there was a terrific wind blowing, and there was heard in the neighboring trees that frightful creaking which, in the words of Lucretius, becomes so sweet and hospitable a sound for the traveller, well housed, well covered, and stretched out in a good bed.

After all these preparations for defence Chicot plunged deliciously into his bed. It must be said that it was soft, and made in such a way as to protect a man from any anxiety caused either by men or things.

In short, he was sheltered behind broad curtains of green serge, and a counterpane as thick as eiderdown spread a gentle warmth over the limbs of the sleeping traveller.

Chicot had supped as Hippocrates orders one to do, that is, sparingly: he had drunk but one bottle of wine; his stomach, properly dilated, sent throughout his organism that sensation of comfort communicated without fail by that complaisant organ which with many who are called honest men takes the place of the heart.

Chicot's room was lighted by a lamp which he had placed on the edge of the table next to his bed; he was reading before going to sleep, and in order to put himself to sleep, a very curious new book, which had just appeared and which was the work of a certain mayor of Bordeaux, named Montagne, or Montaigne. The book had been published in Bordeaux in 1581; it contained the first two parts of a work since well known, and entitled "Essays." The volume was interesting enough for a man to read and re-read during the day. But it had at the same time the advantage of being tiresome enough not to keep from sleeping a man who had ridden fifteen leagues on horseback, and who had drunk his generous bottle of wine for supper.

Chicot prized this book highly, the author of which he knew

personally, and on leaving Paris he had put it into the pocket of his doublet. Cardinal Du Perron had called it the breviary of honest men; and Chicot, capable in every point of appreciating the taste and intelligence of the cardinal, — Chicot, we say, willingly took the "Essays" of the mayor of Bordeaux for his breviary.

However, it happened that in reading the eighth chapter he fell into a deep sleep.

The lamp still burned; the door, reënforced by the wardrobe and the table, was still closed; the sword was still under the pillow with the crowns.

Saint Michael the Archangel would have slept like Chicot, without dreaming of Satan, even if he had known that the lion was roaring on the outside of the door and the other side of the bolts.

We have said that a gale was blowing. The hissing of this gigantic serpent glided with frightful melodies under the door and shook the air in a whimsical manner. The wind is the most perfect imitation, or rather the most perfect mockery, of the human voice: now it screams like a crying child, now it imitates in its groans the heavy anger of a husband quarrelling with his wife.

Chicot was a judge of tempests. At the end of an hour all the noise became an element of tranquillity for him; he fought against every inclemency of the season:

Against the cold, with his counterpane; against the wind, with his snoring; yet, even in sleep, it seemed to Chicot that the tempest grew louder, and especially that it came nearer in an unusual fashion.

Suddenly a squall of terrific force shook the door, wrenched away staples and locks, pushed over the wardrobe, which lost its balance and fell against the lamp, which it extinguished, and on the table, which it crushed. Chicot, although a sound sleeper, had the faculty of waking quickly and with all his presence of mind; this presence of mind told him that he would better slip from the side of the bed than get out in front. As he let himself out, his two hands, quick and disciplined, went rapidly, one to the left for the bag of crowns, the other to the right for the handle of his sword. Chicot opened his eyes wide. Darkness profound.

Then Chicot opened his ears, and it seemed to him as if the night was literally torn asunder by the combat of the four

winds, which were disputing the whole room, from the wardrobe, which continued to crush the table more and more, to the chairs, which rolled about and dashed against one another in falling on the other furniture.

It seemed to Chicot in the midst of all this hubbub that the four winds had entered his room in flesh and blood, and that he had business with Eurus, Notus, Aquilo, and Boreas, in person, with their puffy cheeks and especially their big feet. Resigned, because he realized that he could do nothing against the gods of Olympus, Chicot cowered down in a corner near his bed, like the son of Oileus after one of his great fits of fury which Homer relates.

But he held his long sword couched and sidewise of the wind or rather winds, so that if the mythological personages inconsiderately approached him they could run themselves through even, should the result be that of the wound given by Diomed to Venus.

But after a few minutes of the most abominable racket that ever rent the ear of man, Chicot profited by a momentary respite which the tempest gave him to dominate with his voice the unchained elements, and the furniture given up to a colloquy too noisy to be wholly natural.

Chicot shouted and vociferated.

"Help!"

At length he made so much noise by himself alone that the elements grew calm, as if Neptune in person had uttered the famous *Quos ego*, and after six or eight minutes, during which Eurus, Notus, Boreas, and Aquilo beat a retreat, the host appeared with a lantern, and threw light upon the drama. The scene which he had come to take part in presented a deplorable aspect, and which very much resembled a battlefield. The great wardrobe overturned upon the broken table showed the door without hinges, and which, held by one of its bolts alone, oscillated like the sail of a ship; the three or four chairs which completed the furniture had their backs overturned and their feet in the air; finally, the china which had decorated the table lay cracked and broken on the floor.

"Why, this place is hell!" cried Chicot, recognizing his host in the light of the lantern.

"Oh! monsieur," exclaimed the host, perceiving the frightful havoc which had just been made. "Oh! monsieur, what

has happened?" and he raised his hands and consequently his lantern towards Heaven.

"How many devils are staying with you, my friend, tell me?" roared Chicot.

"Oh! Jesus! what weather!" replied the host with the same pathetic gesture.

"But don't the bolts hold?" continued Chicot. "Is the house made of pasteboard? I would rather get out of this; I prefer the plain."

And Chicot came out from the corner of the bed and appeared, sword in hand, in the space left free between the foot of the bed and the wall.

"Oh, my poor furniture!" sighed the host.

"And my clothes!" cried Chicot; "where are my clothes, which were on this chair?"

"Your clothes, my dear monsieur?" said the host innocently; "if they were there, they must be there now."

"What! If they were there! But do you suppose," said Chicot, "that I came here yesterday in the costume in which you now see me?"

And Chicot strove, but in vain, to drape himself in his light tunic.

"My God! monsieur," replied the host, finding it hard to reply to such an argument, "I know very well that you wore clothes."

"It is fortunate that you agree to that."

"But" —

"But what?"

"The wind has opened everything, scattered everything."

"Ah! that is a reason?"

"You can easily see," said the host, quickly.

"But," resumed Chicot, "follow my calculations, dear friend. When the wind enters a place — and it must have entered here, must it not, to cause the disorder which I see about me?"

"Without a doubt."

"Well! when the wind enters a place, it must come from without."

"Yes, certainly, monsieur."

"You do not deny that?"

"No, that would be foolish."

"Well, then, the wind on entering here ought to bring the

clothes of others into my room, instead of taking mine I do not know where."

"Ah! yes, so it seems to me. But the proof of the contrary exists or seems to exist."

"Comrade," said Chicot, who had explored the floor with his investigating glance, "what road did the wind take to come to me here?"

"Pardon, monsieur?"

"I ask you from what direction the wind comes?"

"From the north, monsieur, from the north."

"Well! he has walked in the mud, for here are his foot-prints on the floor."

And Chicot indeed showed on the floor the recent traces of a muddy boot.

The host grew pale.

"Now, my dear fellow," said Chicot, "if I had any advice to offer you, it would be to watch this kind of wind which enters inns, penetrates into rooms by forcing the doors, and retires after stealing the clothes of travellers."

The host drew back two steps in order to free himself from all the overturned furniture and to gain the exit to the hall.

Then when he felt his retreat assured:

"Why do you call me a thief?" said he.

"Why! what have you done with your good-natured face?" asked Chicot; "I find you completely changed."

"I am changed because you insult me."

"I!"

"Yes, you call me a thief," replied the host, in a louder voice, which sounded very much like a threat.

"I call you thief because you are responsible for my clothes, and because my clothes have been stolen; you do not deny this?"

And it was Chicot, who, like a fencing-master sounding his adversary, made a threatening gesture.

"Holloa!" cried the host, "holloa!"

At this call four men armed with sticks appeared on the stairs.

"Ah! here are Eurus, Notus, Aquilo, and Boreas," said Chicot. "*Ventre de biche!* since opportunity offers, I will rid the earth of the North wind; it will be a service rendered to humanity; then there will be eternal spring."

And he gave such a fierce thrust with his long sword in the

direction of his nearest assailant that had not the latter, with the agility of a true son of Æolus, made a spring backwards, he would have been pierced through and through. Unfortunately, when making the spring he was looking at Chicot, and consequently, unable to see behind him, he fell on the edge of the upper step of the stairway, and, losing his centre of gravity, rolled, with great noise, down its entire length.

This retreat was a signal for the three others, who disappeared through the exit open before them or rather behind them with the swiftness of phantoms swallowed up in a trap.

But the last to vanish had had time while his companions were effecting their descent to say a few words in the ear of the host.

"Well! well!" grumbled the latter, "we will find your clothes."

"Well! that is all I ask."

"And they shall be brought to you."

"Very good; in order not to go naked this is a reasonable request, it seems to me."

In short, the clothes were brought, but were visibly the worse for wear.

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot, "there are a good many nails in your stairway. Devilish winds, to be sure! but after all, it is honorable amends. How could I suspect you? You have such an honest face!"

The host smiled pleasantly.

"And now," said he, "you will go to sleep again, I presume?"

"No, thanks; no, I have slept enough."

"What shall you do, then?"

"You will lend me your lantern, if you please, and I will go on with my reading," replied Chicot, in the same pleasant manner.

The host said nothing; he merely handed his lantern to Chicot and withdrew.

Chicot set the wardrobe up against the door and went back to bed.

The night was calm; the wind had died away, as if the sword of Chicot had penetrated the bottle which held it.

At daybreak the ambassador asked for his horse, paid his bill, and departed, saying:

"We shall see this evening."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW CHICOT CONTINUED HIS JOURNEY AND WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.

Chicot spent the whole morning congratulating himself for having had the coolness and the patience which we have described, during that night of trials.

"But," thought he, "they do not catch an old wolf twice in the same net; it is, therefore, almost certain that to-day they will invent some new deviltry for me; so let us be on our guard."

The result of this reasoning, full of wisdom, was that Chicot, during that day, made a march which Xenophon would not have found unworthy of immortalizing in his Retreat of the Ten Thousand.

Every tree, every rise of ground, every wall served him as a point of observation or natural fortification.

He even concluded, as he went along, alliances, if not offensive, at least defensive.

In short, four important grocers of Paris, who were going to Orleans to order their preserves from Cotignac, and their dried fruits from Limoges, deigned to be pleased with the society of Chicot, who passed himself off as a hosier of Bordeaux, returning home after having concluded his business. But as Chicot, a Gascon by birth, lost his accent only when the absence of this accent was particularly necessary to him, he inspired no distrust among his travelling companions.

This army, therefore, consisted of five masters and four grocers' clerks; it was no more to be despised for its wit than for its number, considering the warlike customs introduced from the League into the habits of the Parisian grocery.

We will not affirm that Chicot professed any great respect for the bravery of his companions, but then, certainly, the proverb is true which says that three cowards together are less than one brave man alone.

Chicot had no further fear, the moment he found himself with four cowards; he even scorned from that time to turn around, as he had before done, to see those who might be following him.

The result of this was that while discussing politics and

boasting a great deal they reached without hindrance the city where the troop was to sup and sleep.

They supped, drank hard, and each went to his room.

During the meal Chicot had been sparing neither of his jokes, which amused his companions, nor of the draughts of Muscatelle and Burgundy, which kept up his wit. They had poked fun among the merchants, that is, among free men, at his Majesty the King of France, and at all the other majesties, whether of Lorraine, Navarre, Flanders, or other places.

Chicot went to bed, after having promised to meet the four grocers the following day, and having been, so to speak, conducted to his room by them in triumph. Maître Chicot, therefore, found himself guarded like a prince, in his corridor, by the four travellers, whose four cells preceded his own, situated at the end of the passage, and consequently impregnable, thanks to the intermediate alliances. In short, as at this time the roads were far from safe, even for those who were charged only with their own business, each one assured himself of the support of his neighbor in case of mishap.

Chicot, who had not related his accidents of the previous night, had helped on, we can easily understand, the drawing up of this article of the treaty, which, for that matter, had been unanimously adopted. Chicot, therefore, without failing in his customary prudence, could go to bed and to sleep. He could do this much better, as he had from additional prudence examined the room minutely, pushed the bolts across his door, and closed the blinds of his window, the only one which the room had; it goes without saying that he had sounded the wall with his fist, and that everywhere the wall had returned a satisfactory answer.

During his first sleep, however, there happened an event which the Sphinx herself, that diviner of riddles, could never have foreseen; but the devil had set about to mix himself up in the affairs of Chicot, and the devil is more acute than all the Sphinxes in the world.

Towards half-past nine there came a timid knock at the door of the grocers' clerks, all four of whom were sleeping together in a sort of garret, above the corridor of the merchants, their employers. One of them awoke in very bad humor, and found himself face to face with the host.

"Gentlemen," said the latter, "I see with much pleasure that you have gone to bed in your clothes; I am going to do

you a great service. Your masters became heated at table in discussing politics. It seems that a sheriff of the town overheard them and repeated their remarks to the mayor; now, our city prides itself on being loyal; and the mayor has just sent the watch, who have seized your employers, and taken them to the Hôtel de Ville for an explanation. The prison is very near the Hôtel de Ville; my boys, get to your feet; your mules are waiting for you, your patrons will join you all right."

The four clerks bounded like deer, rushed down the staircase, jumped, trembling, on their mules, and set out for Paris, after having charged the host to inform their masters of their departure and of the direction taken, if it happened that they came back to the inn.

This done, and having seen the four fellows disappear around the corner of the street, the host, with the same precaution, knocked at the first door in the corridor.

He rapped so loud that the first merchant cried out in stentorian tones:

"Who is there?"

"Silence, wretched man!" replied the host; "come to the door, and walk on tiptoe."

The merchant obeyed, but as he was a prudent man he put his ear to the door instead of opening it, and asked:

"Who are you?"

"Do you not recognize the voice of your host?"

"That is true. Well! my God, what is the matter?"

"It seems that at table you spoke somewhat freely of the King, and the mayor has been informed of it by some spy, so that the watch have come. Fortunately, the idea came to me to point out the room of your clerks, so that he is busy arresting them up there, instead of arresting you here."

"Oh! oh! what are you telling me?" said the merchant.

"The truth, pure and simple. Hurry and save yourself while the stairway is free."

"But my companions?"

"Oh! you have not time to warn them."

"Poor fellows!"

And the merchant dressed hurriedly.

Meanwhile, the host, as though struck by a sudden inspiration, tapped with his finger on the partition which separated the first merchant from the second.

The second, awakened by the same words and the same

story, gently opened his door; the third, awakened by the second, called the fourth; and all four, as swift as a flight of swallows, vanished, raising their arms to Heaven and walking on the tips of their toes.

"That poor hosier," said they; "it is on him that everything will fall; but it is true that he said the most. Faith! Let him look out, for the host has not had time to warn him as he has us!"

In short, Maître Chicot, as we know, had been warned of nothing.

Just as the merchants fled, recommending him to God, he was sleeping his deepest sleep.

The host made sure of this by listening at the door; then he descended to a lower room, the door of which, carefully closed, opened at a signal from him. He took off his cap and entered.

The chamber was occupied by six armed men, one of whom seemed to have the right to command the others.

"Well?" said the latter.

"Well, Monsieur Officer, I have obeyed in every detail."

"Your inn is deserted?"

"Absolutely."

"The person we have indicated has not been warned or wakened?"

"Neither warned nor wakened."

"Monsieur Host, you know in whose name we act; you know what cause we serve, for you yourself are a defender of this cause?"

"Yes, certainly, monsieur; moreover, you see that in order to keep my oath I have sacrificed the money which my guests would have spent at my inn; but it says in this oath: 'I will sacrifice my goods to the defence of the holy Catholic religion.'"

"'And my life!' You forget that word," said the officer, in a haughty tone.

"My God!" cried the host, clasping his hands, "do you demand my life? I have a wife and children."

"We demand it only in case you do not blindly obey what you are ordered to do."

"Oh! I will obey; be sure."

"In that case, go to bed, close the doors, and whatever you may hear or see, do not come out, even if your house should

burn and fall down on your head. You see that your rôle is not difficult."

"Alas! alas! I am ruined," murmured the host.

"I am charged to indemnify you," said the officer; "take these thirty crowns."

"My house valued at thirty crowns!" cried the innkeeper, piteously.

"Well! good Lord! we won't break a single one of your windows, cry-baby that you are. Fie! a wretched champion of the holy League we have here!"

The host withdrew, and shut himself up like a bearer of a flag of truce informed of the sacking of the city. Then the officer ordered the two best armed men to station themselves under Chicot's window. He himself, with the three others, ascended to the chamber of this poor hosier, as his travelling companions, already far from the city, called him.

"You know the order," said the officer. "If he opens, if he lets himself be searched, if we find on him that for which we are looking, you must not do him the slightest injury; but if the contrary happens, a good blow of the dagger, you understand? no pistol, no rifle. Besides, that will be useless, being four against one."

They had reached the door.

The officer knocked.

"Who is there?" cried Chicot, awaking with a start.

"By Heaven!" said the officer, "let us be crafty. Your friends, the grocers, have something important to say to you."

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot, "last night's wine has greatly thickened your voices, my grocers."

The officer softened his voice and in the most insinuating tone:

"But open your door, dear companion and comrade."

"*Ventre de biche!* how your grocery smells of old iron!" said Chicot.

"Ah! you will not open!" cried the officer, impatiently; "come, then, break in the door!"

Chicot ran to the window, raised it, and saw below the two naked swords.

"I am caught!" he cried.

"Ah! ah! comrade," said the officer, who had heard the noise of the opening window, "you fear the perilous leap; you are right. Come, open the door for us, open!"

"Faith! no," said Chicot; "the door is solid and help will come to me when you make a noise."

The officer burst out laughing, and ordered the soldiers to take off the hinges.

Chicot began to shout to rouse the merchants.

"Idiot!" said the officer, "do you suppose that we have left you any help? Undeceive yourself, you are entirely alone, and consequently entirely lost! Come, have courage in your misfortune. Here, you others!"

And Chicot heard the butt-ends of three muskets strike against the door with the force and regularity of three battering-rams.

"There are," said he, "three muskets and one officer; below, two swords only; fifteen feet to jump, a trifle. I prefer swords to muskets."

And tying his bag to his belt, he mounted the window-sill without hesitation, holding his sword in hand. The two men below held their blades in the air.

But Chicot had guessed rightly. No man, were he a Goliath, would await the fall of a man, were he a pigmy, when this man might kill him in killing himself.

The soldiers changed their tactics and drew back, determined to strike Chicot when he had fallen.

This is what the Gascon had expected of them. He jumped like a clever man on his toes, and remained crouched. At the same instant one of the men gave him a blow with the point of his sword which would have pierced a wall.

But Chicot did not even take the trouble to parry. He received the blow full in his chest; but, thanks to Gorenflot's coat of mail, the blade of his enemy broke like glass.

"He is armed with a cuirass!" said one of the soldiers.

"By Heaven!" replied Chicot, who by a back stroke had already split open his head.

The other began to shout, thinking only of parrying, for Chicot was attacking him. Unfortunately, he had not even the strength of Jacques Clement. Chicot stretched him, at the second pass, by the side of his comrade.

So that, when the door was broken in, the officer, looking from the windows, saw only his two sentinels bathed in their blood.

Fifty feet from the dying men, Chicot was calmly escaping.

"He is a devil!" cried the officer; "he is proof against fire."

"Yes, but not against lead," said a soldier, taking aim at him.

"Wretched man!" cried the officer, turning aside the musket. "No noise! You will arouse the whole city; we will find him to-morrow."

"Ah! this is it," said one of the soldiers, philosophically; "four men should have been stationed below and only two above."

"You are a fool!" replied the officer.

"We shall see what Monsieur le Duc will tell him he is," grumbled the other, to console himself.

And he rested the butt-end of his musket on the ground.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THIRD DAY OF THE JOURNEY.

Chicot made his escape with such calmness only because he was at Etampes, that is to say, in a city, in the midst of a population, under the safeguard of a certain number of magistrates, who, at his first requisition, would have given free play to justice, and would have arrested Monsieur de Guise himself.

His assailants thoroughly understood their false position. So the officer, at the risk of letting Chicot escape, forbade his soldiers to use noisy arms. It was for the same reason that he refrained from pursuing Chicot, who at the first step taken to follow him would have uttered cries to arouse the whole city.

The small troop, reduced by a third, were enveloped in the darkness, and in order to compromise themselves the less, they abandoned the two dead men, leaving their swords with them, that it might be supposed they had killed each other. In the quarter, Chicot searched, but in vain, for his merchants and their clerks.

Then, as he rightly supposed that those with whom he had been dealing, seeing their attempt had failed, would not care to remain in the city, he thought that it would be fair play to remain there himself.

He did more; after having made a *détour*, and from the corner of a neighboring street having heard the horses' steps

die away, he had the audacity to return to the inn. He found the host, who had not yet recovered his composure, and who let him saddle his horse in the stable, watching him the while with the same astonishment that he would have had for a phantom.

Chicot took advantage of this friendly stupor not to pay his bill, which the host on his part was careful not to demand.

Then he went to finish the night in the large hall of another inn, in the midst of all the drinkers, who were far from suspecting that this great stranger, with the smiling face and gracious manner, although escaping being killed himself, had just killed two men.

Daybreak found him on the road, a prey to an anxiety which increased every instant. Two attempts had fortunately failed; a third might prove fatal to him. At this moment he would have compromised with all the guards, even to telling them the stories which he knew so well how to invent.

A cluster of trees gave him apprehensions difficult to describe; a ditch made shivers run up and down his back; a somewhat high wall came very near causing him to turn back. From time to time he resolved, once at Orleans, to send a courier to the King, to demand an escort from city to city.

But as the road as far as Orleans was deserted and perfectly safe, Chicot thought that he would needlessly appear like a coward, that the King would lose his good opinion of Chicot, and that an escort would be very troublesome; besides, a hundred ditches, fifty hedges, twenty walls, and ten copses had already been passed without the least object of suspicion having appeared under the branches or on the stones.

But beyond Orleans Chicot felt his terror increase; four o'clock was approaching, that is, evening. The road was dark with trees, and ascended like a ladder; the traveller, alone on the grayish road, seemed like a Moorish target, to whoever might feel a desire to send him a musket-ball.

Suddenly, in the distance Chicot heard a sound which resembled that which galloping horses make on dry ground. He turned, and at the foot of the hill, the half of which he had climbed, he saw some horsemen ascending at full speed.

He counted them; there were seven.

Four had muskets on their shoulders.

The sinking sun drew from each barrel a long, blood-red beam. The horses of these riders were gaining rapidly on

Chicot's horse. Chicot, moreover, did not care to engage in a contest for speed, the result of which would have been to diminish his resources in case of attack. He merely made his horse go zigzag, in order to change the position of the point arrived at by the gunners. It was not without accurate knowledge of the musket in general, and musketeers in particular, that Chicot resorted to this manœuvre; for at the moment when the horsemen were fifty feet from him, he was saluted with four shots, which, following the direction from which the riders fired, passed directly over his head.

As we have seen, Chicot expected these four musket-shots; therefore he had formed his plan in advance. On hearing the balls whistle, he dropped the reins and let himself slip down from his horse. He had taken the precaution to draw his sword from the sheath, and held in his left hand a dagger as sharp as a razor and as pointed as a needle.

He dropped, therefore, we say, and in such a manner that his limbs were springs, bent but ready to unfold; at the same time, thanks to the position gained by his fall, his head was protected by the breast of his horse.

A cry of joy rose from the group of horsemen, who seeing Chicot fall thought him dead.

"I told you so, idiots," said a masked man, riding up at a gallop; "you have lost everything because you did not strictly follow my orders. This time he is down; dead or alive search him, and if he stirs, let him be finished."

"Yes, monsieur," replied one of the troopers, respectfully.

And each dismounted, with the exception of one soldier who held all the bridles and looked after the horses.

Chicot was not exactly a pious man; but at that moment he thought there was a God, that this God was opening his arms to him, and that within five minutes, perhaps, the sinner would be before his Judge. He murmured a sad and fervent prayer, which was certainly heard above.

Two men approached Chicot; both held swords in their hands. They clearly perceived that Chicot was not dead from the manner in which he was groaning. As he did not move and in no way prepared to defend himself the more zealous of the two had the imprudence to approach within reach of his left hand; at once the dagger, pushed forward as though by a lever, entered his throat, on which the blade stamped itself as on soft wax. At the same time the half of the sword, which

was in Chicot's right hand, disappeared in the back of the second cavalier, who was trying to escape.

"By Heaven!" cried the leader, "there is treason here! Load the muskets; the fellow is still very much alive."

"Yes, indeed, I am still alive," said Chicot, whose eyes shot fire, and quick as thought he threw himself on the chief cavalier, thrusting the point of his sword at his mask.

But already two soldiers had surrounded him; he turned, split open a thigh of one with a great thrust of his sword, and freed himself.

"Boys! boys!" cried the chief, "the muskets, by Heaven!"

"Before your muskets are ready," said Chicot, "I shall have opened your entrails, brigand, and I shall have cut the cords of your mask, that I may know who you are."

"Stand firm, monsieur, stand firm, and I will defend you," said a voice which seemed to Chicot to come from Heaven.

It was that of a handsome young man mounted on a fine black horse. He had two pistols in his hand, and cried out to Chicot:

"Stoop down, stoop down, by Heaven! stoop down, I tell you!"

Chicot obeyed.

A pistol shot resounded, and a man rolled at Chicot's feet, letting fall his sword.

The horses were struggling; the three surviving cavaliers strove to find their stirrups, but could not; the young man fired a second pistol shot into the midst of the confusion, and another man fell.

"Two to two," said Chicot; "generous protector, take yours, this is mine."

And he fell upon the masked horseman, who, trembling with rage or fear, held his ground, however, like a man accustomed to the handling of arms.

On his part, the young man had seized his enemy round the waist, and had hurled him to the ground without even taking his sword in his hand. Then he bound him with his belt, like a sheep in the slaughter-house.

Chicot, seeing himself opposite a single adversary, recovered his coolness and consequently his superiority.

He rushed at once upon his opponent, who was endowed with rather ample corpulence, ran him into a ditch along the road,

and upon a second feint gave him a thrust with the point of his sword in the middle of his back.

The man fell.

Chicot placed his foot on the vanquished man's sword, so that he could not recover possession of it, and with his dagger cut the cords of the mask.

"Monsieur de Mayenne!" said he; "*ventre de biche!* I suspected it."

The duke did not reply; he had fainted, partly from loss of blood, partly from the weight of his fall.

Chicot scratched his nose, as was his habit when he had to carry out any act of great importance; then after an instant's reflection, he rolled up his sleeve, took his large dagger, and approached the duke to cut off his head, pure and simple. But he felt an arm of iron pressing his, and heard a voice saying to him:

"Needless, monsieur! we do not kill a fallen enemy."

"Young man," replied Chicot, "you have saved my life, it is true; I thank you with all my heart; but accept a little lesson that may be very useful in these times of moral degradation in which we live. When a man has suffered three attacks in three days, when he has three times risked his life, when he is still warm with the blood of enemies who without any provocation whatsoever on his part fired at him from afar four shots of a musket, as they might have done to a mad wolf, then, young man, this valiant fellow, allow me to tell you, may boldly do what I am about to do."

And Chicot seized the neck of his enemy in order to finish his work.

But this time again the young man stopped him.

"You will not do it, monsieur, at least while I am here. We do not spill blood in this way by the wholesale, like that which is coming from the wound you have already made."

"Bah!" said Chicot in surprise; "you know this wretch?"

"This wretch is Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne, a prince equal in nobility to many a king."

"All the more reason," said Chicot, in a sombre voice. "But you, who are you?"

"I am he who saved your life, monsieur," replied the young man coldly.

"And who, three days ago, on the road to Charenton, if I am not mistaken, gave me a letter from the King?"

"Exactly."

"Then you are in the service of the King, monsieur?"

"I have that honor," replied the young man, bowing.

"And, being in the service of the King, you spare Monsieur de Mayenne? By Heaven, Monsieur, permit me to say to you, that is not being a good servant."

"I think, on the contrary, that it is I who am the good servant of the King just now."

"Perhaps," said Chicot, sadly, "perhaps, but this is not a moment for philosophizing. What is your name?"

"Ernauton de Carmainges, monsieur."

"Well! Monsieur Ernauton, what shall we do with this carrion equal in nobility to all the kings on earth? for, as for myself, I shall make for the fields, I warn you."

"I will watch over Monsieur de Mayenne, monsieur."

"And his companion who is listening yonder, what shall you do with him?"

"The poor devil hears nothing; I strapped him too tight, according to my thinking, and he has fainted."

"Well, Monsieur de Carmainges, you have saved my life to-day, but you compromise it furiously for later on."

"I do my duty to-day; God will take care of the future."

"Let it be as you please, then. Besides, it goes against me to kill this defenceless man, although he is my most cruel enemy. So, adieu, monsieur."

And Chicot pressed Ernauton's hand.

"Perhaps he is right," said he to himself, going back to his horse.

Then retracing his steps:

"As a matter of fact," said he, "you have seven good horses here; I think I have won four of them for myself; help me, then, to choose from them. You know them?"

"Take mine," replied Ernauton, "I know what he can do."

"Oh! that is too much generosity, keep him for yourself."

"No, I have not as much need as you of riding fast."

Chicot was not used to being urged; he threw himself on Ernauton's horse and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ERNAUTON DE CARMAINGES.

Ernauton remained on the field of battle, greatly embarrassed as to what he should do with the two enemies who were about to open their eyes in his arms. In the meantime, as there was no danger of their escaping, and as it was probable that Maître Robert Briquet (it was by this name, we may remember, that Ernauton knew Chicot), and as it was probable, we say, that Maître Robert Briquet would not return to make way with them, the young man set out in search of help, and was not slow in finding what he sought on that very road.

A wagon which must have passed Chicot on the way appeared at the top of the hill, standing out boldly against a sky reddened by the fires of the setting sun. This wagon was drawn by two oxen and led by a peasant. Ernauton hailed the driver, who, on perceiving him, had had a great desire to leave his wagon and flee into the copse, and told him that a combat had just taken place between Huguenots and Catholics; that this combat had been fatal to four of them, and that two had survived. The peasant, greatly terrified at the responsibility of such a task, but still more frightened, as we have said, by the warlike appearance of Ernauton, aided the young man in lifting Monsieur de Mayenne into the wagon, and then the soldier, who, unconscious or not, still kept his eyes closed. The four dead cavaliers were left behind.

"Monsieur," said the peasant, "were these four men Catholics or Huguenots?"

Ernauton had seen the peasant, in his fright, make the sign of the cross.

"Huguenots," said he.

"In that case," continued the peasant, "there would be no harm in my searching them, would there?"

"None," replied Ernauton, who was just as willing for the peasant with whom he was dealing to be the heir as the next passer-by.

The peasant did not wait to be told twice and turned the pockets of the dead men inside out. The dead had had good pay while alive, apparently, for, the operation over, the brow of the peasant lighted up. There resulted a joy which spread

at once through his body and soul so that he urged on his oxen more briskly in order the more quickly to reach his hut.

It was in the stable of this excellent Catholic, on a good bed of straw, that Monsieur de Mayenne regained consciousness. The pain caused by the jolting of the wagon had not succeeded in reviving him; but when some fresh water, sprinkled on the wound, caused some drops of red blood to flow, the duke opened his eyes and looked at the men and objects around him with a surprise easy to imagine.

As soon as Monsieur de Mayenne had opened his eyes Ernauton dismissed the peasant.

"Who are you, monsieur?" asked Mayenne.

Ernauton smiled.

"Do you not recognize me, monsieur?" said he.

"Yes," replied the duke, frowning, "you are the one who came to the assistance of my enemy."

"Yes," returned Ernauton; "but I am also the one who prevented your enemy from killing you."

"That must be so," said Mayenne, "since I am living, unless, however, he thought me dead."

"He went away knowing you were alive, monsieur."

"At least, he thought my wound mortal."

"I do not know, but in any case, had I not interfered, he would have given you one which would have been so."

"But, monsieur, why did you assist in killing my men, in order afterwards to prevent this man from killing me?"

"Nothing is more simple, monsieur, and I am surprised that a gentleman such as you seem to me to be should not understand my conduct. Chance led me to the road you were following; I saw several men attacking one alone, I defended the single man; then, when this brave fellow to whose assistance I had gone, for, whoever he is, monsieur, the man is brave, — then, when this brave fellow, left face to face with you, had decided the victory by the blow which laid you low, seeing that he was about to take advantage of the victory by killing you, I interposed with my sword."

"You know me, then?" asked Mayenne, with a scrutinizing glance.

"I have no wish to know you, monsieur; I know that you are a wounded man, and that is enough for me."

"Be frank, monsieur," said Mayenne, "you know me?"

"It is strange, monsieur, that you are not willing to under-

stand me. As for myself, I do not consider it any more noble to kill a defenceless man than for six men to attack one who is passing by."

"You will admit, however, that there might be reasons for anything?"

Ernauton bowed, but did not reply.

"Did you not perceive," continued Mayenne, "that I crossed swords alone with this man?"

"I saw that; it is true."

"Besides, this man is my most mortal enemy."

"I believe that, for he said the same of you."

"And if I survive my wound?"

"That does not concern me. You will do as you please, monsieur."

"Do you think me very seriously wounded?"

"I have examined your wound, monsieur, and I think that, although serious, there is no danger of death. The steel glided along the ribs, I believe, and did not penetrate the chest. Take a breath, and I think you will feel no pain in your lungs."

Mayenne breathed, painfully, but without inward suffering.

"That is true," said he; "but the men who were with me?"

"Are dead with the exception of one."

"Were they left on the road?" asked Mayenne.

"Yes."

"Were they searched?"

"The peasant whom you must have seen on opening your eyes, and who is your host, acquitted himself of that task."

"What did he find on them?"

"Some silver."

"And papers?"

"I do not know."

"Ah!" said Mayenne, with evident satisfaction.

"For the rest, you can gain information from the man who lives."

"But where is the one who lives?"

"In the barn, two feet from here."

"Take me to him, or rather, bring him to me, and if you are an honorable man, as I believe, swear to me that you will ask him no questions."

"I am not curious, monsieur, and, as far as this affair is concerned, I know all that it is necessary for me to know."

The duke still gazed at Ernauton with anxiety.

"Monsieur," said the latter, "I should be pleased if you would charge some one else with the commission you wish to give me."

"I am wrong, monsieur, and I acknowledge it," said Mayenne. "Have the extreme kindness to render me the service I ask of you."

Five minutes later the soldier entered the stable.

He gave a cry on seeing the Duke de Mayenne, but the latter had the strength to lay his finger on his lips; the soldier at once grew silent.

"Monsieur," said Mayenne to Ernauton, "my gratitude will be everlasting, and no doubt, some day, we shall meet under happier circumstances. May I ask you to whom I have the honor of speaking?"

"I am the Vicomte Ernauton de Carmainges, monsieur."

Mayenne expected more details, but it was the young man's turn to be reserved.

"You were going to Beaugency, monsieur?" continued Mayenne.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then I have inconvenienced you, and you cannot ride further to-night, perhaps?"

"On the contrary, monsieur, I count on resuming my journey at once."

"For Beaugency?"

Ernauton looked at Mayenne like a man whom this insistence greatly annoyed.

"For Paris," said he.

The duke seemed surprised.

"Pardon," continued Mayenne, "but it is strange that going to Beaugency, and being stopped by an unforeseen circumstance, you give up the object of your journey, without a serious reason."

"Nothing is simpler, monsieur," replied Ernauton; "I was going to keep an appointment. Our meeting, which forced me to stop here, has caused me to fail in keeping this appointment; I shall return, therefore."

Mayenne strove in vain to read on the impassible face of Ernauton another thought than that expressed by his words.

"Oh! monsieur," said he, finally, "why will you not stay with me a few days? I will send to Paris by this soldier for

a surgeon, for you see, do you not, that I cannot stay alone with these peasants, who are unknown to me?"

"And why, monsieur," replied Ernauton, "should your soldier not remain with you, and I send you a surgeon?"

Mayenne hesitated.

"Do you know the name of my enemy?" he asked.

"No, monsieur."

"What! you saved his life, and he did not tell you his name?"

"I did not ask it of him."

"You did not ask it of him?"

"I saved your life also, monsieur; have I, for that, asked your name? but, in return, you both know mine. What difference does it make if the deliverer know the name of his debtor or not? It is the debtor who should know that of his deliverer."

"I see, monsieur," said Mayenne, "that there is nothing to be learned from you, and that you are as discreet as you are brave."

"And I, monsieur, I see that you utter those words with intended reproach, and I regret it; for, in truth, that which alarms you should, on the contrary, reassure you. One is not very discreet in one thing without being a little so in another."

"You are right; your hand, Monsieur de Carmainges."

Ernauton gave him his hand; but without anything in his manner to show that he knew he was giving it to a prince.

"You have taken exception to my conduct, monsieur," continued Mayenne; "I cannot justify myself without revealing important secrets. It is better, I think, that we carry our confidences no further."

"Note, monsieur," replied Ernauton, "that you are defending yourself without my having accused you. You are perfectly free, believe me, to speak or keep silent."

"Thanks, monsieur, I will keep silent. But know that I am a gentleman of good family, in a position to do you any favor I might wish to do."

"Let us stop there, monsieur," replied Ernauton, "and believe that I shall be as discreet in regard to your influence as I have been in regard to your name. Thanks to the master I serve, I have need of no one."

"Your master?" asked Mayenne, anxiously, "what master, if you please?"

"Oh! no more confidences, you said so yourself, monsieur," replied Ernauton.

"That is fair."

"And since your wound is beginning to grow inflamed, speak less, monsieur, I beg of you."

"You are right. Oh! I must have my surgeon."

"I am returning to Paris, as I have had the honor of telling you; give me his address."

Mayenne made a sign to the soldier, who approached; thereupon both talked in low tones. With his customary discretion, Ernauton moved away. At length, after a few moments' consultation, the duke turned to Ernauton.

"Monsieur de Carmainges," said he, "your word of honor that if I give you a letter for some one, this letter will be faithfully delivered to that person."

"I give it, monsieur."

"And I believe it; you are too gallant a man for me not to trust you blindly."

Ernauton bowed.

"I will confide to you a part of my secret," said Mayenne. "I am one of the guards of Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier."

"Ah!" said Ernauton, innocently, "Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier has guards? I did not know it."

"In these troublesome times, monsieur," replied Mayenne, "every one surrounds himself as best he may, and the house of De Guise being a royal house" —

"I do not ask for an explanation, monsieur. You belong to the guards of Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier; that is enough for me."

"I will resume, then: I was charged with a mission which necessitated my making a journey to Amboise, when, on the road, I met my enemy. You know the rest."

"Yes," said Ernauton.

"Stopped by this wound before accomplishing my mission, I ought to let Madame la Duchesse know the reason for my delay."

"That is right."

"Therefore you will deliver to her, into her own hands, the letter which I will have the honor of writing to her."

"If, indeed, there be ink and paper here," replied Ernauton, rising in search of these articles.

"Never mind," said Mayenne; "my soldier must have my tablets about him."

In fact, the soldier drew from his pocket some closed tablets. Mayenne turned to the wall to press a spring, the tablets opened; he wrote a few lines in pencil, and closed the tablets in the same mysterious way.

Once closed, it was impossible to open them, if one was ignorant of the secret, except by breaking them.

"Monsieur," said the young man, "in three days these tablets shall be delivered."

"Into her own hands?"

"To Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier herself."

The duke pressed the hand of his kind companion, and worn out both by the conversation in which he had just taken part, and by the letter which he had written, he fell back on the fresh straw, the perspiration on his brow.

"Monsieur," said the soldier, in a tongue which seemed to Ernauton but little in harmony with his costume, "monsieur, you bound me like a calf, it is true, but, whether you wish it or not, I regard these bonds as a chain of friendship, and will prove it to you in proper time and place."

And he held out a hand, the whiteness of which the young man had already noticed.

"So be it," said Carmainges, smiling; "behold me then with two extra friends."

"Do not joke, monsieur," said the soldier, "one never has too many."

"That is true, comrade," replied Ernauton.

And he departed.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE COURT OF THE HORSES.

Ernauton set out at once, and as he had taken the duke's horse in place of his own which he had given to Robert Briquet, he rode rapidly, so that by noon of the third day he reached Paris. At three o'clock in the afternoon he entered the Louvre, and the lodgings of the Forty-Five.

No event of importance marked his return.

The Gascons, seeing him, uttered shouts of surprise.

At these shouts Monsieur de Loignac entered, and perceiving Ernauton, assumed his most frowning expression, which did not prevent Ernauton from going straight to him.

Monsieur de Loignac signed to the young man to pass into the little cabinet situated at the end of the dormitory, a sort of audience-hall, in which this judge, without appeal, rendered his decisions.

"Is this the way to act, monsieur?" said he at once; "if I count correctly you have been absent five days and five nights, and it was you, monsieur, whom I thought one of the most reasonable, who has set the example of such breach of discipline."

"Monsieur," replied Ernauton, bowing, "I have done what I was told to do."

"And what were you told to do?"

"I was told to follow Monsieur de Mayenne, and I have followed him."

"For five days and five nights?"

"For five days and five nights, monsieur."

"The duke left Paris, then?"

"That same evening, and it seemed to me suspicious."

"You were right, monsieur. And then?"

Thereupon Ernauton began to relate briefly, but with the warmth and energy of a man of spirit, the adventure on the road, and the results which this adventure brought about. As he advanced in his story, the changeable face of De Loignac grew light with every impression which the narrator roused in his soul.

But when Ernauton came to the letter entrusted to his care by Monsieur de Mayenne:

"You have this letter?" cried Monsieur de Loignac.

"Yes, monsieur."

"The devil! this deserves some attention," said the captain; "wait for me, monsieur, or rather come with me, I beg of you."

Ernauton let himself be led, and arrived with De Loignac at the Court of the Horses of the Louvre.

Everything was preparing for the King's going out; equipages were being made ready; Monsieur D'Épernon was watching them try two new horses, recently sent from England, a present from Elizabeth to Henry; these two horses, remarkably harmonious in size and shape, were that very day to be harnessed to the King's carriage for the first time.

While Ernauton waited at the entrance of the court, Monsieur de Loignac approached Monsieur d'Épernon and touched the hem of his cloak.

"News, Monsieur le Duc!" said he, "important news!"

The duke left the group in which he was standing and approached the stairway by which the King was to descend.

"Tell me, Monsieur de Loignac, tell me."

"Monsieur de Carmainges has arrived from beyond Orleans; Monsieur de Mayenne is in a village seriously wounded."

The duke uttered an exclamation.

"Wounded!" he cried.

"And more," continued De Loignac, "he has written to Madame de Montpensier a letter which Monsieur de Carmainges has in his pocket."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed D'Épernon. "*Parfandious!* bring Monsieur de Carmainges here, that I may speak to him."

De Loignac took hold of the hand of Ernauton, who, as we have said, was standing aside, out of respect, during the colloquy of his chiefs.

"Monsieur le Duc," said he, "here is our traveller."

"Good, monsieur. You have, it seems, a letter from Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne?" said D'Épernon.

"Yes, my lord."

"Written in a small village near Orleans?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And addressed to Madame de Montpensier?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Kindly give me this letter, if you please."

And the duke extended his hand with the easy negligence of a man who thinks he need but express his wishes, whatever they be, in order to have them obeyed.

"Pardon, my lord," said Carmainges, "but did you tell me to give you the letter from Monsieur de Mayenne to his sister?"

"Yes."

"Monsieur le Duc forgets that this letter was entrusted to me."

"What does that matter?"

"It matters greatly, my lord. I gave my word to Monsieur le Duc that this letter should be delivered to the duchess herself."

"Do you belong to the King or to Monsieur de Mayenne?"

"I belong to the King, my lord."

"Well, the King desires to see this letter."

"My lord, you are not the King."

"In truth, I think that you forget to whom you are speaking, Monsieur de Carmainges!" said D'Épernon, pale with anger.

"I remember perfectly, my lord, on the contrary, and that is why I refuse."

"You refuse; you said that you refused, I believe, Monsieur de Carmainges."

"That is what I said."

"Monsieur de Carmainges, you forget your oath of fidelity."

"My lord, up to the present time, so far as I know, I have sworn fidelity to but one person, and this person is his Majesty. If the King demands the letter of me, he shall have it, for the King is my master; but the King is not here."

"Monsieur de Carmainges," said the duke, who was visibly losing all self control, while Ernauton, on the contrary, seemed to grow cooler the more he resisted; "Monsieur de Carmainges, you are, like every one in your country, blind in prosperity; your fortune dazzles you, my little gentleman; the possession of a state secret stuns you like a heavy blow."

"That which stuns me, Monsieur le Duc, is the disgrace in which I am about to fall with your lordship, but not my fortune, which my refusal to obey you renders dubious. But it makes no difference, I do what I ought to do, and shall do nothing but that, and no one except the King shall have the letter you demand of me, unless it be the person to whom it is addressed."

Monsieur D'Épernon made a terrible movement.

"De Loignac," said he, "you will at once have Monsieur de Carmainges put into the dungeon."

"It is certain that by this means," said Carmainges, smiling, "I cannot deliver to Madame de Montpensier the letter of which I am the bearer, at least so long as I remain in this dungeon, but once out" —

"If you come out," said D'Épernon.

"I shall come out, monsieur, unless you have me murdered there," said Ernauton, with a determination, which, as he spoke, became cooler and more terrible; "yes, I shall come out, its walls are less firm than my will. So, monsieur, once out" —

"Well! once out?"

"Well, I shall speak to the King, and the King will answer me."

"To the dungeon! to the dungeon!" thundered D'Épernon, losing all control of himself; "to the dungeon, and have his letter taken from him!"

"No one shall touch it!" cried Ernauton, springing back and drawing from his breast the tablets of Mayenne. "I will tear this letter in pieces, since I can save it only at this price; and Monsieur de Mayenne will approve my doing this, and his Majesty will pardon me."

And in fact, the young man in his loyal resistance was about to tear the precious envelope in two when a hand gently arrested his arm. If the pressure had been violent, no doubt the young man would have redoubled his efforts to destroy the letter, but seeing that discretion was used, he stopped and looked over his shoulder.

"The King!" said he.

In fact, the King, on leaving the Louvre, had descended the stairway, and having paused for an instant on the last step, had heard the end of the discussion, and his royal arm had stayed that of Carmainges.

"What is the matter, gentlemen?" he demanded, in that tone to which he knew how to give, when he so desired, royal authority.

"It seems, sire," cried D'Épernon, without taking the trouble to hide his anger, "it seems that this man, one of your Forty-Five Guardsmen (for that matter, he is about to cease to be one), it seems, I say, that having been sent by me in your name to watch Monsieur de Mayenne during his stay in Paris, he followed him beyond Orleans, and there received from him a letter addressed to Madame de Montpensier."

"You received from Monsieur de Mayenne a letter for Madame de Montpensier?" demanded the King.

"Yes, sire," replied Ernauton; "but Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon does not tell you under what circumstances."

"Well! this letter," demanded the King, "where is it?"

"That is exactly the cause of the trouble, sire; Monsieur de Carmainges refuses absolutely to give it to me, and wishes to carry it to its address, a refusal which shows he is a poor servant, according to my way of thinking."

The King looked at Carmainges. The young man bent one knee to the ground.

"Sire," said he, "I am a poor gentleman, an honorable man, that is all. I saved the life of your messenger, whom Monsieur de Mayenne and five of his companions were about to assassinate, for, arriving in time, I caused the chances of the combat to turn in his favor."

"And in this combat did anything happen to Monsieur de Mayenne?" asked the King.

"Yes, sire, he was wounded, and even seriously."

"Good!" said the King, "and then?"

"Then, sire?"

"Yes."

"Your messenger, who seems to have some private reasons for hatred against Monsieur de Mayenne" —

The King smiled.

"Your messenger, sire, wished to make way with his enemy; perhaps he had the right to do so, but I thought that in my presence, that is, in the presence of a man whose sword belongs to your Majesty, this vengeance would be a political assassination, and" —

Ernauton hesitated.

"Finish," said the King.

"And I saved Monsieur de Mayenne from your messenger, as I had saved your messenger from Monsieur de Mayenne."

D'Épernon shrugged his shoulders, De Loignac bit his long mustache, the King stood unmoved.

"Continue," said he.

"Monsieur de Mayenne, reduced to a single companion, the four others having been killed, Monsieur de Mayenne, reduced, I say, to a single companion, was unwilling to be separated from him, and not knowing that I belonged to your Majesty, trusted in me and requested me to carry a letter to his sister. I have this letter; here it is; I offer it to your Majesty, sire, in order that you may dispose of it as you may dispose of me. My honor is dear to me, sire, but from the moment I have the guarantee of the royal will for answer to my conscience, I renounce my honor; it is in good hands."

Ernauton, still kneeling, held out the tablets to the King.

The King pushed them aside gently with his hand.

"What were you saying, then, D'Épernon? Monsieur de Carmainges is an honest man and a faithful servant."

"I, sire?" said D'Épernon. "Your Majesty asks what I was saying?"

"Yes; did I not hear as I came down the staircase the word 'dungeon'? By Heaven! quite the contrary, when one chances to meet a man like Monsieur de Carmainges, one should speak, as did the ancient Romans, of crowns and rewards. A letter always belongs to the one who carries it, duke, or to the one to whom it is carried."

D'Épernon bowed, grumbling.

"You will deliver your letter, Monsieur de Carmainges."

"But, sire, think of what it may contain," said D'Épernon. "Do not play with delicacy, when it is a question of your Majesty's life."

"You will deliver your letter, Monsieur de Carmainges," went on the King, without replying to his favorite.

"Thank you, sire," said Carmainges, preparing to withdraw.

"Where do you deliver it?"

"To Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier, I thought I had had the honor of telling your Majesty."

"I do not make myself clear. To what address? I mean is it to the Hôtel de Guise, to the Hôtel Saint Denis, or to Bel"—

A glance from D'Épernon stopped the King.

"I have no particular instruction from Monsieur de Mayenne on this subject, sire; I will carry the letter to the Hôtel de Guise, and there I shall find out where Madame de Montpensier is."

"Then you will set out in search of the duchess?"

"Yes, sire."

"And having found her?"

"I will give her my message."

"That is right. Now, Monsieur de Carmainges"—

And the King regarded the young man steadily.

"Sire?"

"Have you sworn or promised anything more to Monsieur de Mayenne than to deliver this letter into the hands of his sister?"

"No, sire."

"You did not promise, for instance," insisted the King, "something like secrecy as to the place in which you might find the duchess?"

"No, sire, I promised nothing like it."

"I shall impose on you, then, one sole condition, monsieur."

"Sire, I am your Majesty's slave."

"You will deliver this letter to Madame de Montpensier, and as soon as this is done you will join me at Vincennes, where I shall be this evening."

"Yes, sire."

"And you will give me a faithful account as to where you have found the duchess?"

"Sire, your Majesty may count on it."

"Without other explanation or confidence, you understand?"

"Sire, I promise."

"What imprudence!" said Duke d'Épernon. "Oh, sire!"

"You do not know men, duke, or at least certain men. This one is loyal to Mayenne; therefore he will be loyal to me."

"To you, sire!" cried Ernauton, "I will be more than loyal, I will be devoted."

"Now, D'Épernon," said the King, "no quarrels here, and you will at once pardon this brave servant for what you regarded as a lack of devotion, and what I regard as a proof of loyalty."

"Sire," said Carmainges, "Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon is too superior a man not to have seen in the midst of my disobedience to his orders, a disobedience for which I express to him my every regret, how I respect and love him; but before all else, I did what I considered my duty."

"*Parfandious!*" said the duke, changing the expression of his face with the same ease as a man would have taken off or put on a mask, "this is a test which does you honor, my dear Carmainges, and you are, in truth, a fine fellow; is he not, De Loignac? But, in the meantime, we gave him a good fright."

And the duke burst out laughing. De Loignac turned on his heels, in order not to answer; he did not feel, thorough Gascon though he was, that he had the strength to lie with the same effrontery as his illustrious chief.

"It was a test?" said the King, doubtfully; "so much the better, D'Épernon, if it was a test; but I do not advise you to use these tests with every one, too many would succumb to them."

"So much the better!" repeated Carmainges in his turn, "so much the better, Monsieur le Duc, if it is a test; I am sure, then, of the kind pardon of my lord."

But, as he said these words, the young man also seemed as little disposed to believe as the King.

"Well! now that everything is settled, gentlemen," said Henry, "let us go."

D'Épernon bowed.

"You are coming with me, duke?"

"I am to accompany your Majesty on horseback; such is the order you gave, I believe."

"Yes. Who is to be at the other coach-door?"

"A devoted servant of your Majesty," said D'Épernon, — "Monsieur de Sainte Maline."

And he watched the effect this name produced on Ernauton.

Ernauton remained impassive.

"De Loignac," he added, "call Monsieur de Sainte Maline."

"Monsieur de Carmainges," said the King, who understood the intention of the Duc d'Épernon, "you will carry out your commission, will you not, and return at once to Vincennes?"

"Yes, sire."

And Ernauton, in spite of all his philosophy, set out, pleased enough not to be present at the triumph which would so greatly cause the ambitious heart of Sainte Maline to rejoice.

CHAPTER XL.

THE SEVEN SINS OF MAGDALENE.

The King had glanced at his horses, and seeing them so strong and so skittish, he had been unwilling to risk the carriage by himself; consequently, after having given full justice, as we have seen, to Ernauton, he had signed to the duke to take a seat in his coach.

De Loignac and Sainte Maline took their places at the doors; a single outrider went in advance.

The duke was given a place by himself on the front of the massive carriage, and the King, with all his dogs, installed himself among the cushions at the back.

Among all these dogs there was a favorite; it was the one we saw in Henry's arms in his box at the Hôtel de Ville, and which had its special cushion, on which it was sleeping gently. At the right of the King was a table, the feet of which were

fixed to the floor of the coach; this table was covered with illuminated designs, which his Majesty cut out with marvellous skill, in spite of the jolting of the carriage.

They were for the most part sacred subjects. But as at this time there was in religion a somewhat tolerant mixture of pagan ideas, mythology was rather well represented in the religious designs of the King.

For the moment, Henry, always methodical, had made a choice among all these designs, and was occupied in cutting out the life of Magdalene, the sinner.

The subject in itself was picturesque, and the imagination of the artist had further added to the natural inclination of the subject. Magdalene was there, beautiful, young, and fêted; sumptuous baths, balls, and pleasures of all kinds figured in the collection.

The artist had had the ingenious idea, as Callot had later in his *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, — the artist, we say, had had the ingenious idea of covering the fancies of his brush with the legitimate mantle of ecclesiastical authority; so each design, with the current title of the seven capital sins, was explained by a special legend:

"Magdalene yielding to the sin of anger."

"Magdalene yielding to the sin of gluttony."

"Magdalene yielding to the sin of pride."

"Magdalene yielding to the sin of lust."

And so on, to the seventh and last capital sin.

The picture which the King was occupied in cutting out as they passed the Porte Saint Antoine represented Magdalene yielding to the sin of anger.

The beautiful sinner, half reclining on cushions, and without other covering than the magnificent golden hair with which later she was to wipe the perfumed feet of Christ, — the beautiful sinner, we say, was having a slave who had broken a precious vase thrown into a fish-pond on the right, filled with lampreys, the greedy heads of which were seen rising from the water like the heads of so many serpents, while on the left she was having beaten a woman (still more scantily clothed than herself, and wearing her hair in a knot) who, in arranging her mistress's locks, had pulled out some of those magnificent hairs, the profusion of which should have made Magdalene more indulgent to a fault of that kind.

The background of the picture represented dogs being beaten

for having let pass with impunity some poor beggars who were seeking alms, and roosters being strangled for having sung too loud and too early.

On reaching the Faubin Cross the King had finished cutting out all the figures in this picture, and was preparing to turn to the one entitled "Magdalene yielding to the sin of gluttony."

This represented the beautiful sinner reclining on one of those couches of purple and gold on which the ancients took their repasts; the table was ornamented with everything that the Roman gastronomers knew of the choicest in meats, fish, and fruits, from dormice in honey and mullets with Falerno, to lobsters from Stromboli and pomegranates from Sicily. On the floor, dogs were wrangling over a pheasant, while the air was darkened with birds of a thousand hues, which were carrying away from this blessed table, figs, strawberries, and cherries, which now and then they let fall on a family of mice, waiting, with noses in the air, for this manna which was coming to them from heaven. Magdalene held in her hand, and filled with a liquor as golden as a topaz, one of those peculiarly shaped glasses which Petronius has described in the Feast of Trimalchion.

Wholly engaged in this important work, the King had been content to raise his eyes on passing the priory of the Jacobins, the bell of which was ringing a full peal for vespers. All the doors and windows of the said priory were closed so tight that one would have thought it uninhabited had not the sound of the bell been heard from within the building.

Having given this glance, the King actively resumed his cutting. But a hundred feet further on an attentive observer would have given a more curious glance than the first to a house of fine appearance which stood on the left of the road, and which, built in the midst of a charming garden, opened upon the highway behind an iron gate with gilded lances.

This country house was called Bel Esbat.

Exactly contrary to the convent of the Jacobins, Bel Esbat had all its windows open, with the exception of one, in front of which hung a Venetian blind. Just as the King passed, this blind underwent an imperceptible swaying.

The King exchanged a glance and a smile with D'Épernon, then set to work to attack another capital sin.

The latter was the sin of lust.

The artist had depicted it in startling colors, and had stamped the sin with such strength and tenacity that we can cite only one feature of it, although this feature is entirely episodical. The guardian angel of Magdalene, thoroughly startled, was flying to heaven, hiding his eyes with his two hands.

This picture, full of minute details, was so absorbing that the King continued to drive on without noticing a certain specimen of vanity who was assuming an air of affected dignity on the left side of his coach. It was a great pity, for Sainte Maline was very happy, and very proud on his horse.

He so near the King, he the youngest son from Gascony, within hearing of his Majesty, the most Christian King, when he said to his dog :

" Very fine, Master Love, you weary me."

Or to Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon, colonel-general of the infantry of the kingdom :

" Duke, it seems to me that these horses will break my neck."

From time to time, however, as if to give his pride a fall, Sainte Maline looked on the other side of the coach at De Loignac, whom the customary honors rendered indifferent to these very honors ; and, seeing that this gentleman was handsomer with his calm manner and modest military bearing than he himself could possibly be, with all his swaggering airs, Sainte Maline strove to calm himself, but soon certain thoughts caused a fierce outburst of his vanity.

" They see me, they look at me," said he, " and they are asking themselves : ' Who is that fortunate gentleman accompanying the King ? ' "

At the rate they were going, and which scarcely justified the apprehensions of the King, the happiness of Sainte Maline might have lasted a long time, for the horses of Elizabeth, loaded with heavy harness, covered with silver and lace, and imprisoned in traces similar to those of the ark of David, did not advance rapidly in the direction of Vincennes. But as he was growing too proud, something like a warning from above came to temper his joy, something sadder than all else for him. He heard the King pronounce the name of Ernauton.

Two or three times in two or three minutes the King uttered this name. Each time it was necessary for Sainte Maline to lean forward to catch this interesting enigma on the wing.

But like everything really interesting, the enigma was interrupted by some accident or noise. The King uttered some exclamation which was forced from him by his vexation at having given a certain part of his picture a chance cut of the scissors, or by an injunction to keep quiet, addressed with all possible tenderness to Master Love, who yelped with the exaggerated but visible pretension of making as much noise as a mastiff.

The fact is that from Paris to Vincennes the name of Ernauton was pronounced ten times by the King, and at least four times by the duke, without Sainte Maline's being able to understand for what purpose these ten repetitions had taken place.

He imagined (we always like to delude ourselves) that it was merely a question on the part of the King of asking the cause of the young man's disappearance, and on the part of the duke of telling the cause, either assumed or real. When they arrived at Vincennes there still remained three sins to cut out. So, under the specious pretext of devoting himself to this grave occupation, his Majesty, almost as soon as he descended from the coach, shut himself up in his room.

A piercing wind was blowing; Sainte Maline, therefore, had begun to make himself comfortable near a great chimney, where he hoped to get warm and fall asleep, when De Loignac laid a hand on his shoulder.

"You are on fatigue duty to-day," said he, in the short tone which belongs only to a man who, having obeyed a great deal, knew how to make himself obeyed; "you will therefore sleep some other evening; so rise, Monsieur de Sainte Maline."

"I will keep awake for fifteen days, if necessary, monsieur," replied the latter.

"I am sorry I have no one else at hand," said De Loignac, pretending to look around him.

"Monsieur," interrupted Sainte Maline, "it is useless for you to speak to another; if necessary I will not sleep for a month."

"Oh! we shall not be as exacting as that; calm yourself."

"What must I do, monsieur?"

"Remount your horse and return to Paris."

"I am ready; I put my horse still saddled in the stall."

"That is well. You will go direct to the lodgings of the Forty-Five."

"Yes, monsieur."

"There you will waken them all, but in such a way that, except the three chiefs whom I shall designate to you, no one shall know where he is going or what he is going to do."

"I will obey these first orders exactly."

"Here are the others: you will leave fourteen of these gentlemen at the Porte Saint Antoine; fifteen others half way on the road, and you will bring the fourteen remaining ones here."

"Consider that as done, Monsieur de Loignac; but at what hour will it be necessary to leave Paris?"

"At nightfall."

"On horseback or foot?"

"On horseback."

"What arms?"

"Everything: daggers, swords, and pistols."

"Cuirasses?"

"Cuirasses."

"The rest of the order, monsieur?"

"Here are three letters, one for Monsieur de Chalabre, one for Monsieur de Biran, and one for you. Monsieur de Chalabre will command the first squad, Monsieur de Biran the second, and you the third."

"Good, monsieur."

"You will open these letters only when on the spot itself. When six o'clock sounds, Monsieur de Chalabre will open his at the Porte Saint Antoine, Monsieur de Biran at the Faubin Cross, you at the gate of the Donjon."

"Will it be necessary to come quickly?"

"With all the speed of your horses; without arousing any suspicion, however, or being noticed. To leave Paris, each squad will take a different gate: Monsieur de Chalabre, the Porte Bourdelle; Monsieur de Biran, the Porte du Temple; you, who have the longest distance to travel, will take the direct route, that is, the Porte Saint Antoine."

"Very good, monsieur."

"The remaining instructions are in these three letters. Now go."

Sainte Maline bowed, and started to leave.

"By the way," said De Loignac, "from here to the Faubin Cross go as fast as you like; but from the Faubin Cross to the gate walk your horse. You have still two hours before dark; it is more time than you will need."

"Very good, monsieur."

"Have you clearly understood, or do you want me to repeat the order?"

"It is needless, monsieur."

"A pleasant journey to you, Monsieur de Sainte Maline."

And De Loignac, dragging his spurs, reëntered the apartments.

"Fourteen in the first squad, fifteen in the second, and fifteen in the third; evidently they are not counting on Ernauton, and he is no longer one of the Forty-Five."

Saint Maline, puffed up with pride, carried out his commission like an important but prompt man.

Half an hour after his departure from Vincennes, having carried out all De Loignac's instructions to the letter, he passed through the gate. A quarter of an hour later he was in the lodging of the Forty-Five.

The most of these gentlemen were already in their rooms, relishing the odor of supper, which was smoking in the respective kitchens of their housekeepers.

Thus, the noble Lardille de Chavantrade had prepared a dish of mutton and carrots, with a large quantity of spices, that is, in the Gascon mode, — a succulent dish to which, on his part, Militor was giving some attention, namely, some strokes of an iron fork, by the help of which he was testing the degree of dressing for the meats and vegetables.

Thus, Pertinax de Montcrabeau, with the assistance of this singular domestic who did not use "thee" and "thou" to him, but to whom he used them, — Pertinax de Montcrabeau, we say, was exercising his own culinary talents for a squad at common expense. The mess organized by this clever administrator included eight associates, each of whom paid six sous for the meal.

Monsieur de Chalabre never ate ostensibly; he was considered as a mythological being placed by nature beyond every need. That which made one doubt his divine nature was his leanness.

He looked upon breakfast, dinner, and supper of his companions like a proud cat which does not want to beg, but which, nevertheless, is hungry, and which, in order to satisfy its hunger, licks its mustaches. However, it is fair to say that when one offered him anything, and those times were rare, he refused, having, he said, the last morsels in his mouth, and the morsels were never less than pheasants, red partridges,

larks, woodcock pies, and delicate fish. The whole had been skillfully sprinkled with a profusion of wines from Spain and the Archipelago of the best brands, such as Malaga, Cyprus, and Syracuse.

All this company, as we see, disposed as it wished of the silver of his Majesty Henry III.

For the rest, one could judge of the character of each according to the appearance of his little lodging. Some loved flowers, and cultivated in a broken stone jug before the window a lean rose-bush, or some yellowing scabrous plant; others, like the King, had a taste for pictures, without possessing his skill in cutting them out; still others, like veritable canons, had introduced into their lodging the housekeeper or her niece. Monsieur d'Épernon had said in a low tone to De Loignac that he could close his eyes to the Forty-Five not inhabiting the interior of the Louvre, and De Loignac closed his eyes.

Nevertheless, when the trumpet had sounded, all this company became soldiers and slaves of a rigorous discipline, jumped on horseback, and held themselves ready for anything, In winter they went to bed at eight o'clock, in summer at ten; but only fifteen of them slept, fifteen others slept merely with one eye closed, and the rest did not sleep at all.

As it was only half-past five in the afternoon, Sainte Maline found the Forty-Five up, and in the most gastronomic condition in the world.

But at a single word he turned aside all the porringers.

"To horse, gentlemen!" said he.

And leaving the most of the martyrs to the confusion of this manœuvre, he explained the order to Messieurs de Biran and de Chalabre.

Some, in buckling on their belts, and fastening their cuirasses, swallowed large mouthfuls moistened by a great draught of wine; others, whose supper was less advanced, fortified themselves with resignation. Monsieur de Chalabre alone, in tightening the tongue of his sword-belt, pretended to have had supper over an hour ago.

The roll was called.

Only forty-four, including Sainte Maline, responded.

"Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges is absent," said Monsieur de Chalabre, whose turn it was to exercise the functions of quartermaster.

A deep joy filled the heart of Sainte Maline, and ebbed up as far as his lips, which puckered into a smile, a rare occurrence with this man of gloomy, jealous temperament. In short, in Sainte Maline's eyes Ernauton was infallibly ruined by this groundless absence, at the time of an expedition of such importance. The Forty-Five, or rather the forty-four, therefore, set out, each squad by the route which was indicated to it; that is, Monsieur de Chalabre, with thirteen men, by the Porte Bourdelle; Monsieur de Biran, with fourteen, by the Porte du Temple; and finally, Saint Maline, with fourteen others, by the Porte Saint Antoine.

CHAPTER XLI.

BEL ESBAT.

It is needless to say that Ernauton, whom Sainte Maline thought so completely ruined, was, on the contrary, following the unexpected course of his rising fortune.

At first he had very naturally calculated that the Duchess of Montpensier, whom he was charged to find, would be at the Hôtel de Guise, since she had come to Paris. Therefore Ernauton first set out toward the Hôtel de Guise, where, having rapped at the great door, which was opened to him with extreme caution, when he demanded the honor of an interview with Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier, they cruelly laughed in his face. Then, as he insisted, he was told that he ought to know that her highness lived at Soissons and not in Paris. Ernauton expected this reception, therefore it did not trouble him.

"I am in despair at her absence," said he. "I had a communication of the greatest importance to make to her highness from Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne."

"From Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne?" said the porter; "and who, then, charged you with this communication?"

"Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne himself."

"Charged by him! the duke!" cried the porter, with admirably feigned astonishment; "and where did he charge you with this communication? Monsieur le Duc is no more in Paris than is Madame la Duchesse."

"I know that very well," replied Ernauton; "but I too might not be in Paris. I too may have met Monsieur le Duc elsewhere than in Paris; on the road from Blois, for instance."

"On the road from Blois?" repeated the porter, somewhat more attentive.

"Yes; on this road he may have met me, and charged me with a message for Madame de Montpensier."

Some slight anxiety appeared on the face of the porter, who, as though he feared that an entrance would be forced, still held the door half open.

"Well," said he, "this message?"

"I have it."

"With you?"

"Here," said Ernauton, tapping his doublet.

The faithful servant fixed on Ernauton a questioning glance.

"You say that you have this message with you?" he asked.

"Yes, monsieur."

"And that this message is important?"

"Of the greatest importance."

"Will you just let me see it?"

"Willingly."

And Ernauton drew from his breast the letter from Monsieur de Mayenne.

"Oh! Oh! What singular ink!" said the porter.

"It is blood," replied Ernauton, phlegmatically.

At these words the servant turned pale, and still more, no doubt, at the thought that this blood might be that of Monsieur de Mayenne.

In those times there was a scarcity of ink but a great quantity of blood spilled; the result was that lovers frequently wrote to their mistresses, and relatives to their family, with the liquid most commonly distributed.

"Monsieur," said the servant, in great haste, "I do not know whether you will find Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier in Paris or in the suburbs of Paris; but at all events, be kind enough to proceed without delay to a house in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, called Bel Esbat, and which belongs to Madame la Duchesse. You will recognize it, as it is the first on your left going towards Vincennes, beyond the convent of the Jacobins; you will surely find some one there in the service of Madame la Duchesse, and intimate enough with her to be able

to tell you where Madame la Duchesse may be found at present."

"Very well," said Ernauton, who understood that the servant either could not or would not say anything further. "Thanks."

"In the Faubourg Saint Antoine," repeated the servant, "every one knows and will show you Bel Esbat, — although perhaps it may not be known that it belongs to Madame de Montpensier, Madame de Montpensier having bought this home a short time ago, to have as a retreat."

Ernauton gave a nod of the head, and turned towards the Faubourg Saint Antoine. Without even asking for information he had no trouble in finding this house of Bel Esbat, which adjoined the priory of the Jacobins.

He rang the bell; the door opened.

"Enter," said a voice.

He entered, and the door closed behind him.

Once within he was evidently expected to utter some password; but, as he merely looked about him, he was asked what he wanted.

"I want to speak to Madame la Duchesse," said the young man.

"And why do you come seeking Madame la Duchesse at Bel Esbat?" asked the valet.

"Because," replied Ernauton, "the porter at the Hôtel de Guise sent me here."

"Madame la Duchesse is no more at Bel Esbat than in Paris," replied the valet.

"Then," said Ernauton, "I shall wait until a more propitious moment to fulfil the commission for her with which I was charged by Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne."

"For her! for Madame la Duchesse?"

"For Madame la Duchesse."

"A commission from Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne?"

"Yes."

The valet reflected a moment.

"Monsieur," said he, "I cannot take it upon myself to answer you; but I have a superior here whom I must consult. Kindly wait."

"Here are people who are well served, by Heaven!" said Ernauton. "What order, what discipline, what promptness! surely they are dangerous people who think they must be

"YOU!" CRIED THE LADY IN TURN.

guarded in this way. One cannot enter the houses of Messieur de Guise as one can the Louvre, far from it; so I am beginning to believe that it is not the real king of France whom I serve."

And he looked about him; the court was deserted, but all the doors of the stables were open, as though they expected some troop to enter, and take up its quarters.

Ernauton was interrupted in his examination by the valet, who returned; he was followed by another valet.

"Trust your horse to me, monsieur, and follow my comrade," said he; "you will find some one who can answer you much better than I can."

Ernauton followed the valet, waited an instant in a sort of antechamber, and soon after, upon the order which had been given the servant, was introduced into a small adjoining room, in which a woman dressed without pretension, though with a certain elegance, was working at embroidery.

She sat with her back to Ernauton.

"Here is the gentleman who presents himself on the part of Monsieur de Mayenne, madame," said the lackey.

She turned around.

Ernauton gave a cry of surprise.

"You, madame!" he cried, recognizing at once his page and the unknown lady of the litter under this third transformation.

"You!" cried the lady in turn, letting her work fall and looking at Ernauton.

Then making a sign to the lackey:

"Go," said she.

"You belong to the house of Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier, madame?" asked Ernauton in surprise.

"Yes," said the unknown; "but you, you, monsieur, how do you bring here a message from Monsieur de Mayenne?"

"By a number of circumstances which I could not foresee, and which would be too long to relate to you," said Ernauton, with extreme caution.

"Oh! you are discreet, monsieur," continued the lady, smiling.

"Whenever it is necessary, yes, madame."

"I do not see that this is an occasion for such great discretion," said the unknown; "for indeed, if you really bring a message from the person you say" —

Ernauton made a movement.

"Oh! do not be angry; if you indeed bring a message from the person you say you do, the affair is sufficiently interesting for you in remembrance of our intimacy, passing as it was, to tell us what this message is."

The lady put into these last words all the coquettish, caressing, and seductive charm that a pretty woman can put into a request.

"Madame," replied Ernauton, "you will not make me say that which I do not know."

"And still less that which you will not tell."

"I have nothing whatever to say, madame," said Ernauton, bowing.

"Do as you please in regard to verbal communications, monsieur."

"I have no verbal communication to make, madame; my whole mission consists in delivering a letter to her highness."

"Well, then, this letter?" said the unknown lady, extending her hand.

"This letter?" said Ernauton.

"Kindly give it to us."

"Madame," said Ernauton, "I thought I had had the honor of informing you that this letter was addressed to Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier."

"But the duchess is absent," said the lady, impatiently; "I represent her here; you can therefore"—

"I cannot."

"You mistrust me, monsieur?"

"I ought to, madame," said the young man, with a glance the expression of which could not be mistaken; "but in spite of the mystery of your conduct, you have inspired in me, I will admit, other sentiments than those of which you speak."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the lady, blushing slightly at the intense look of Ernauton.

Ernauton bowed.

"Be careful, Monsieur Messenger," said she, laughing, "you are making a declaration of love to me."

"Why, yes, madame," said Ernauton; "I do not know if I shall ever see you again, and indeed the opportunity is too precious for me to let it escape."

"Ah, I understand."

"You understand that I love you, madame? Indeed, that is an easy thing to understand."

"No, I understand why you came here."

"Ah! pardon, madame," said Ernauton, "it is my turn not to understand."

"Yes, I understand that having the desire to see me again you feigned a pretext to introduce yourself here."

"I, madame, a pretext! Ah! you judge me wrongly; I did not know that I should ever again see you, and I trusted to chance, which already had twice thrown me in your path; but I feign a pretext? — never! I am a strange creature, and I do not think on all subjects as does every one else."

"Oh! oh! you are in love, you say, and you have scruples as to the method of seeing the one you love? That is very fine, monsieur," said the lady, with a certain mock pride; "well, I suspected that you had scruples."

"And about what, madame, if you please?" asked Ernauton.

"The other day you met me; I was in a litter; you recognized me, and yet you did not follow me."

"Take care, madame," said Ernauton, "you are admitting that you noticed me."

"Ah! a fine admission, really! Have we not been seen under circumstances which allowed me, me especially, to put my head out of my litter, when you passed? But no; monsieur galloped away, after having uttered an 'Ah!' which made me tremble within my litter."

"I was forced to continue on my way, madame."

"By your scruples?"

"No, madame, by my duty."

"Well, well," said the lady, laughing, "I see that you are a reasonable, discreet lover, and who above all else are afraid of compromising yourself."

"As you had inspired me with certain fears, madame," replied Ernauton, "is there anything surprising in that? Tell me, is it customary for a woman to wear man's clothes, force the barriers, and come to the Grève to look at the quartering of a wretched victim, and this with many gesticulations more than incomprehensible; tell me?"

The lady grew slightly pale, then, so to speak, hid her pallor under a smile.

Ernauton continued.

"Is it natural, in short, that this lady, as soon as she has had this strange pleasure, should be afraid of being arrested,

and should flee like a robber, she who is in the service of Madame de Montpensier, a powerful princess, although on rather bad terms at court."

This time the lady smiled again, but with more marked irony.

"You have but little perspicuity, monsieur, in spite of your pretension to be observing," said she, "for with a little sense, indeed, everything that seems mysterious to you would at once be made clear. In the first place, was it not very natural that Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier should be interested in the fate of Monsieur de Salcède, in what he might say, in his revelations, false or true, very likely to compromise the entire house of Lorraine? And if that was natural, monsieur, was it less so that this princess should send some reliable, intimate person, in whom she could have entire confidence, to be present at the execution, and ascertain in person, as they say at the palace, the smallest details of the affair? Well, this person, monsieur was I, I, the intimate friend of her highness. Now let us see, do you think that I could go to the Grève in woman's clothes? Do you think, in short, that I could be indifferent, now that you know my position with the duchess, to the sufferings of the victim and to his smallest revelations?"

"You are perfectly right, madame," said Ernauton, bowing, "and now, I swear to you, I admire your spirit and your logic just as much as a moment ago I admired your beauty."

"Many thanks, monsieur. But now that we understand each other, and that matters have been explained between us, give me the letter, since the letter exists and is not a mere pretext."

"Impossible, madame."

The unknown made an effort not to grow angry.

"Impossible?" she repeated.

"Yes, impossible, for I swore to Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne to deliver this letter only to Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier herself."

"Say rather," cried the lady, beginning to give way to her anger, "say rather that this letter does not exist; say that, in spite of your pretended scruples, this letter has been but the pretext of your entrance here; say that you wished to see me again, and that that is all. Well! monsieur, you are satisfied; not only have you entered here, not only have you seen me again, but you have also told me that you adore me."

"And in that, as in everything else, madame, I have told you the truth."

"Well! so be it, you adore me; you wished to see me again; you have seen me; I have procured you a pleasure in exchange for a service. We are quits, adieu!"

"I will obey you, madame, and since you dismiss me I will retire."

This time the lady became angry in earnest.

"Yes!" said she; "but if you know me, I do not know you. Does it not seem to you that on this point you have too much of an advantage over me? Ah! you think that, under some pretext or other, it is sufficient to enter the house of any princess, for you are in the house of Madame de Montpensier, monsieur, and to say: 'I have succeeded in my perfidy, I will retire.' Monsieur, such an act is not that of a gallant man."

"It seems to me, madame," said Ernauton, "that you give a very hard name to that which at most would have been a trick of love, if, as I have had the honor of telling you, it were not an affair of the greatest importance and of unvarnished truth. I refuse to notice your cruel words, madame, and I shall absolutely forget everything affectionate and tender I may have said to you, since you are so ill-disposed toward me. But I will not leave here under the weight of the unpleasant imputations to which you have subjected me. I have, as a matter of fact, a letter from Monsieur de Mayenne to deliver to Madame de Montpensier, and this is the letter. It is written in his hand, as you may see from the address."

Ernauton held out the letter to the lady, but without giving it up.

The unknown glanced at it and exclaimed:

"His writing! Blood!"

Without replying, Ernauton replaced the letter in his pocket, bowed a last time with his usual courtesy, and pale and sick at heart, turned towards the door of the apartment. This time she ran after him, and, like Joseph, he was seized by his cloak.

"Your pleasure, madame?" said he.

"For pity's sake, monsieur, forgive!" cried the lady, "forgive; has some accident happened to the duke?"

"Whether I forgive you or not, madame," said Ernauton, "it is all the same; as to this letter, since you ask forgiveness of me in order to read it, and since Madame de Montpensier alone shall read it" —

"Ah! wretched madman that you are!" cried the duchess,

with a fury full of majesty, "do you not recognize me, or rather do you not guess me to be the mistress? and do you think these eyes shine like those of a servant? I am the Duchess of Montpensier; give me this letter."

"You the duchess?" cried Ernauton, recoiling in amazement.

"Yes! to be sure. Come, now, give it to me; do you not see that I am in haste to know what has happened to my brother?"

But instead of obeying, as the princess expected him to do, the young man, having recovered from his first surprise, crossed his arms.

"How can you expect me to believe your words," said he, "you whose lips have already twice lied to me?"

The eyes which the princess had called to the aid of her words shot two mortal flashes, but Ernauton bore their fire bravely.

"You still mistrust! You need proofs when I make a statement!" cried the imperious woman, tearing her lace ruffles with her beautiful hands.

"Yes, madame," replied Ernauton, coldly.

The unknown ran to a bell, which she came near breaking, so violent was the pull with which she rang it.

The vibration resounded sharply throughout all the apartments, and before it had died away a valet appeared.

"What does madame wish?" he asked.

The unknown stamped her foot with rage.

"Mayneville," said she, "I want Mayneville. Is he not here?"

"Yes, madame."

"Well! have him come, then!"

The valet fled from the room. A minute later Mayneville entered hurriedly.

"At your command, madame," said he.

"'Madame'! and since when have they called me simply 'madame,' Monsieur de Mayneville?" said the duchess, exasperated.

"At your highness's command," said Mayneville, bowing, and surprised to the point of stupefaction.

"It is well!" said Ernauton, "for I have opposite me a gentleman, and if he tells me a falsehood, by Heaven, I shall at least know on whom to lay the blame!"

"You believe at last, then?" said the duchess.

"Yes, madame, I believe; and as proof, here is the letter."

And the young man bowed, and handed to Madame de Montpensier the letter so long disputed.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE LETTER FROM MONSIEUR DE MAYENNE.

The duchess took the letter, opened it, and read it eagerly without even trying to hide the impressions which succeeded one another on her face, like clouds across the sky during a hurricane.

When she had finished she handed to Mayneville, who was as anxious as herself, the letter brought by Ernauton. It read as follows:

"My Sister: I tried myself to do the business of a captain or master of arms. I have been punished. I have received a good sword-thrust from the fellow whom you know, and with whom for so long I have had an account. The worst of it all is that he killed five of my men, among them Boularon and Desnoises, that is, two of the best; after which he fled. I must say that he was greatly aided in his victory by the bearer of this letter, a charming young man, as you will see. I recommend him to you, he is discretion itself.

"One merit which he will have for you, I presume, my very dear sister, is that he prevented my conqueror from cutting off my head, which the conqueror had a great desire to do, having torn off my mask while I had fainted, and having recognized me. I recommend you, my sister, to find out the name and calling of this very discreet cavalier; he is suspicious, while of interest to me. To all my offers of service he merely replied that the master he serves lets him want for nothing.

"I can tell you no more about him, for this is all I know; he pretends that he does not know me. Note this.

"I am suffering a very great deal, but am in no danger, I think. Send my surgeon to me quickly; I am, like a horse, on straw. The bearer will tell you the place.

"Your affectionate brother,

"Mayenne."

The letter read, the duchess and Mayneville, equally astonished, looked at each other.

The duchess was the first to break the silence which would have been interpreted by Ernauton.

"To whom," asked the duchess, "are we indebted for the signal service which you have rendered us, monsieur?"

"To a man who, whenever he can, madame, comes to the assistance of the weak against the strong."

"Will you give me some details, monsieur," insisted Madame de Montpensier.

Ernauton related all that he knew, and indicated the retreat of the duke. Madame de Montpensier and Mayneville listened to him with an interest easy to comprehend.

Then when he had finished:

"May I hope, monsieur," asked the duchess, "that you will continue the work so well begun, and that you will attach yourself to our house?"

These words, uttered in the gracious tone which the duchess knew so well how to assume at times, contained a very flattering meaning after the avowal which Ernauton had made to the duchess's maid of honor; but the young man, setting aside all pride, reduced these words to simple curiosity. He saw clearly that to state his name and his position would open the eyes of the duchess to the results of this event; he easily guessed, too, that the King in making his one condition as to an explanation of the residence of the duchess had something else in view besides mere information.

Two interests, therefore, struggled within him; as a man in love, he could sacrifice the one; as a man of honor, he could not abandon the other.

The temptation was all the stronger as by avowing his position in regard to the King he would gain an immense importance in the eyes of the duchess; and because it was no small consideration for a young man coming straight from Gascony to be important in the eyes of a duchess of Montpensier.

Sainte Maline would not have hesitated an instant.

All these thoughts rushed through the mind of Carmainges, and had no other influence than to make him somewhat more proud, that is, somewhat stronger.

At that moment it would have been a very great deal to be something; much for him at a time when he had certainly been taken almost for a plaything.

The duchess therefore waited for his reply to the question she had asked of him: "Are you disposed to attach yourself to our house?"

"Madame," said Ernauton, "I have already had the honor of saying to Monsieur de Mayenne that my master is a good master, and by the way in which he treats me he relieves me from seeking a better one."

"My brother tells me in his letter, monsieur, that you did not seem to recognize him. How, not having recognized him there, did you use his name here, to enter my house?"

"Monsieur de Mayenne seemed to wish to preserve his incognito, madame, therefore I did not think I ought to recognize him, and indeed it might have been inconvenient for the peasants with whom he is lodged to know on what an illustrious guest they were bestowing their hospitality. Here, this inconvenience no longer exists; on the contrary, the name of Monsieur de Mayenne opened a way to you. Therefore I resorted to it. In this case, as in the other, I think I have acted like a gallant man."

Mayneville looked at the duchess as though to say to her:

"He is cunning, madame."

The duchess understood thoroughly.

She looked at Ernauton, smiling.

"No one could extricate himself better from an embarrassing question," said she, "and you are, I must acknowledge, a man of great cleverness."

"I see nothing clever in that which I have had the honor of telling you, madame," replied Ernauton.

"In short, monsieur," said the duchess, with some impatience, "I see clearly by all this that you will tell nothing. Perhaps you do not sufficiently reflect that gratitude is a heavy burden for one who bears my name; that I am a woman, that you have twice rendered me a service, and that if I really wished to know your name, or rather who you are" —

"I well know, madame, that you can easily learn all that; but you will learn it from some one else besides myself, and I shall have said nothing."

"He is always right," said the duchess, fixing on Ernauton a glance which, had he understood its entire meaning, would have given more pleasure to the young man than any glance had yet done.

Therefore he asked no more, but, like the gourmand who

rises from the table when he thinks he has drunk the best wine of the repast, Ernauton bowed and asked leave of the duchess to retire.

"So, monsieur, that is all you have to say to me?" asked the duchess.

"I have executed my commission," replied the young man; "nothing remains for me but to present my very humble respects to your highness."

The duchess followed him with her eyes, without returning his bow; then, when the door had closed behind him:

"Mayneville," said she, stamping her foot, "have this young man followed."

"Impossible, madame," replied Mayneville; "all our men are away; I myself am awaiting the event. It is a poor day to do anything except that which we have decided to do."

"You are right, Mayneville; truly, I am mad; but later" —

"Oh! later; that is a different thing; as you will, madame."

"Yes, for I suspect him, as does my brother."

"Suspicious or not," replied Mayneville, "he is a brave fellow, and brave men are rare. We must admit that we are fortunate — a stranger, an unknown man, falling from Heaven to render us such a service."

"Never mind, never mind, Mayneville; if we are obliged to abandon him at this moment, watch him later, at least."

"Ah! madame, later," said Mayneville, "we shall have no need, I hope, to watch any one."

"Well, decidedly, I do not know what I am saying this evening; you are right, Mayneville, I am losing my wits."

"It is permitted to a general like yourself, madame, to be preoccupied on the eve of a decisive action."

"That is true. It is dark, Mayneville, and the Valois returns from Vincennes at dark."

"Oh! we have time before us; it is not eight o'clock, madame, and besides, our men have not yet arrived."

"All have the word, have they not?"

"All."

"They are reliable men?"

"Tried, madame."

"How do they come?"

"Alone and walking."

"How many do you expect?"

"Fifty; it is more than necessary. Understand, moreover,

that besides these fifty men we have two hundred monks who are worth as many soldiers, if, indeed, they are not worth more."

"As soon as our men have arrived, have your monks line up on the road."

"They are already instructed, madame; they will intercept the way, our men will push the carriage towards them, the gate of the convent will be open, and will have merely to close in on the coach."

"Well, let us have supper, then, Mayneville; that will make the time pass for us. I am so impatient that I should like to push forward the hands of the clock."

"The hour will come; rest assured."

"But our men, our men?"

"They will be here on time; eight o'clock has scarcely struck, there is no time lost."

"Mayneville, Mayneville, my poor brother demands his surgeon; the best surgeon, the best cure for De Mayenne's wound would be a lock of hair from the shaved Valois, and the man who should carry him that gift, Mayneville, this man would be sure of being welcome."

"In two hours, madame, this man will set out to find our dear duke in his retreat; having left Paris a fugitive, he will return to it a conqueror."

"Another word, Mayneville," said the duchess, pausing on the threshold of the door.

"What, madame?"

"Are our friends in Paris warned?"

"What friends?"

"Our Leaguers."

"God forbid, madame! To warn a bourgeois is to sound the bell of Notre Dame. The deed done, remember that before anything is known about it, we have fifty couriers to despatch; then the prisoner will be safe in the cloister, and we can defend ourselves against an army. If necessary, we will risk nothing further, and can cry from the roofs of the convent: 'The Valois is ours!'"

"Well, well, you are a clever and prudent man, Mayneville, and the Béarnais is right in calling you 'Mèneligue.' I intended doing something of what you have just said; but my ideas were confused. Do you know that my responsibility is great, Mayneville, and that never at any time will a woman

have undertaken and accomplished such a work as the one which I plan?"

"I well know it, madame, therefore I counsel you, trembling."

"So I sum up," resumed the duchess, with authority; "the monks are armed under their robes?"

"They are."

"The swordsmen on the road?"

"They should be there now."

"The bourgeois informed after the event?"

"That is the business of three couriers; in ten minutes, Lachapelle Marteau, Brigard, and Bussy Leclerc will be told; these in turn will inform the others."

"In the first place, have those two great fellows killed whom we saw riding on either side of the coach; and done in such a way that afterwards we may describe the event as it will be most advantageous to our interests to describe it."

"Kill those poor devils!" said Mayneville; "you think it is necessary to kill them, madame?"

"De Loignac? he would be no great loss!"

"He is a brave soldier."

"A worthless fellow, like that other ill-looking man who pranced on the left of the coach, with his burning eyes and dark skin."

"Ah! that one I feel less reluctant about. I do not know him; besides, I am of your opinion, madame, he has a bad look about him."

"You give him up to me, then?" said the duchess, laughing.

"Oh! with all my heart, madame."

"Many thanks, truly."

"My God, madame, I will not argue over it; what I say is always for your own reputation and for the morality of the party we represent."

"That is well, that is well, Mayneville, we know that you are a virtuous man, and we will sign you a certificate for it, if necessary. You will count for nothing in all this affair, they will have defended the Valois, and will have been killed defending him. What I recommend to you is this young man."

"What young man?"

"The one who left here; see if he is indeed gone, and if he is not some spy, sent us by our enemies."

"Madame," said Mayneville, "I am at your command."

He stepped to the balcony, half opened the blinds, put his head out, and tried to see outside.

"Oh! A dark night!" said he.

"A good, an excellent night," said the duchess; "the darker the better; so courage, my captain."

"Yes, but we shall see nothing, madame, and yet for you it is important to see."

"God, whose interests we are defending, sees for us, Mayneville."

Mayneville, who, at least so we may believe, was not as confident as Madame de Montpensier as to the intervention of God in affairs of this kind, — Mayneville returned to the window, and gazing into the darkness as far as it was possible to do so, remained motionless.

"Do you see any one passing?" asked the duchess, extinguishing the lights, out of precaution.

"No, but I hear the tramp of horses."

"Well, well, it is they, Mayneville. All goes well."

And the duchess looked to see if she had still at her belt the famous pair of gold scissors which was to play so important a part in history.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HOW DOM MODESTE GORENFLOT BLESSED THE KING AS HIS MAJESTY PASSED BEFORE THE PRIORY OF THE JACOBINS.

Ernauton left with a full heart but a perfectly clear conscience. He had had the singular good fortune to declare his love to a princess, and, by the important conversation which had immediately succeeded it, had made his declaration forgotten, just enough for it to do no harm for the present, and for it to bear fruit in the future.

This was not all; he had again had the chance not to betray the King, not to betray Monsieur de Mayenne, and not to betray himself.

He was content, therefore, but he still desired many things, and among these things a speedy return to Vincennes in order to inform the King, then, the King informed, to go to sleep and dream.

Dreaming is the supreme happiness of men of action; it is the only rest they allow themselves.

So, scarcely was he outside of the gate of Bel Esbat when Ernauton put his horse to the gallop; but he had hardly galloped a hundred feet on that companion, so well tried for several days, when he saw himself suddenly stopped by an obstacle which his eyes, dazzled by the light of Bel Esbat and still unaccustomed to the darkness, had not perceived and could not measure.

It was simply a company of horsemen, who closed in upon the middle of the road from both sides, surrounded him, and aimed at his breast half a dozen swords and as many pistols and daggers.

It was too much for a single man.

"Oh! oh!" said Ernauton, "stealing on the road a league from Paris; deuce take the country! The King has a bad provost; I must advise him to change him."

"Silence, if you please," said a voice which Ernauton thought he recognized; "your sword, your arms, and be quick."

A man took hold of the horse's bridle; two others despoiled Ernauton of his arms.

"The deuce! what clever men!" murmured Ernauton.

Then turning to those who stopped him:

"Gentlemen," said he, "at least you will do me the favor to tell me"—

"Oh! it is Monsieur de Carmainges!" said the chief highwayman, the very one who had just seized the young man's sword and who still held it.

"Monsieur de Pincornay!" cried Ernauton. "Oh! Fie! What a mean business you are carrying on here."

"I said silence!" repeated the resounding voice a few feet away, "let this man be led to the station."

"But, Monsieur de Sainte Maline," said Perducas de Pincornay, "this man whom we have just arrested"—

"Well?"

"Is our companion, Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges."

"Ernauton here!" cried Sainte Maline, turning white with anger; "what is he doing here?"

"Good evening, gentlemen," said Carmainges, calmly; "I did not think, I confess, to find myself in such good company."

Sainte Maline remained silent.

"It seems that I am arrested," continued Ernauton; "for I do not suppose that you were going to rob me."

"The devil! the devil!" growled Sainte Maline, "the event was not foreseen."

"None the more on my side, I swear to you," said Carmainges, laughing.

"It is embarrassing; come, what were you doing on the road?"

"If I put this question to you, Monsieur de Sainte Maline, would you answer me?"

"No."

"Then you will approve of my acting as you would act."

"So you are not willing to tell what you were doing on the road?"

Ernauton smiled, but did not reply.

"Nor where you were going?"

The same silence.

"Then, monsieur," said Sainte Maline, "since you will not explain yourself, I am forced to treat you as I would any man."

"Do so, monsieur; but I warn you that you will answer for what you do."

"To Monsieur de Loignac?"

"Higher than that."

"To Monsieur d'Épernon?"

"Higher still."

"Well, so be it! I have my orders, and I shall send you to Vincennes."

"To Vincennes? Good! that is where I was going, monsieur."

"I am glad, monsieur," said Sainte Maline, "that this little journey tallies so well with your intentions."

Two men, pistols in hand, at once took possession of the prisoner, whom they led to two other men stationed five feet from the first. These two did the same, and in this manner Ernauton had the society of his comrades as far as the courtyard itself of the Donjon.

Within this courtyard Carmainges perceived fifty disarmed horsemen, who, with long faces and pale brows, and surrounded by a hundred and fifty light horses, arrived from Nogart and Brie, were deploring their ill luck and waiting for some villanous explanation of an enterprise so well begun.

There were our Forty-Five, who, as a sort of prelude to their duty, had captured all these men, some by craft, others by main force; now by uniting ten against two or three, now by graciously accosting the horsemen whom they thought would be formidable, and by pointing their pistols directly at them, when the others thought that they were merely meeting comrades and receiving courtesies.

The result was that no combat had occurred, no cry had been uttered, and that in an encounter of eight against twenty, a chief of the Leaguers, who had laid his hand on his dagger to defend himself, and opened his mouth to shout, had been gagged, almost smothered, and hurried away by the Forty-Five, with the agility with which the crew of a ship shoots a cable between the fingers of a chain of men. Now, such an affair would have greatly rejoiced Ernauton if he had understood it; but the young man saw without comprehending, which made matters somewhat cloudy for ten minutes.

However, when he had recognized all the prisoners whom he had joined:

"Monsieur," said he to Sainte Maline, "I see that you were informed of the importance of my mission, and that like a gallant comrade you feared some unfortunate meeting for me and determined to take the trouble of having me escorted; now, I can say to you that you were wholly in the right; the King is waiting for me, and I have important matters to tell him. I will even add that as, without you, I probably should not have reached here, I shall have the honor of telling the King what you have done for the good of his service."

Sainte Maline turned red, as he had turned pale; but he understood, like the clever man he was when not blinded by some passion, that Ernauton spoke the truth, and that he was expected. They did not joke with Messieurs de Loignac and D'Épernon; therefore he contented himself with replying:

"You are free, Monsieur Ernauton; delighted to have been able to be of use to you."

Ernauton hurried from the ranks, and ascended the steps which led to the apartments of the King.

Sainte Maline followed him with his eyes, and half way up the stairway he saw De Loignac receive Monsieur de Carmainges and sign to him to come on.

De Loignac then came down; he proceeded to the despoiling of the captives.

He found, and it was De Loignac who stated this fact, that the road, now free, thanks to the arrest of the fifty men, would be safe until the following day, since the hour at which these fifty men were to gather at Bel Esbat had passed.

There was, therefore, no more danger in the King's returning to Paris.

De Loignac counted without the convent of the Jacobins and without the artillery and musketry of the good monks, of which D'Épernon had been thoroughly informed by Nicholas Poulain.

So, when De Loignac went to his chief and said:

"Monsieur, the roads are free," D'Épernon answered him:

"Very well. The order of the King is that the Forty-Five form three squads, one in front and one on either side of the coach; a sufficient defence so that the firing, if there chance to be any, may not reach the carriage."

"Very well," replied De Loignac, with the impassibility of the soldier; "but as to any firing, as I see no muskets I do not expect any shots."

"At the Jacobins, monsieur, you will close the ranks," said D'Épernon.

This dialogue was interrupted by a movement which was taking place on the stairs. It was the King descending, ready to start; he was followed by a few gentlemen, among whom, with a tightening of the heart easy to understand, Sainte Maline recognized Ernauton.

"Gentlemen," asked the King, "are my brave Forty-Five assembled?"

"Yes, sire," said D'Épernon, showing him a group of horsemen drawn up under the arches.

"The orders have been given?"

"And will be carried out, sire."

"Then let us start," said his Majesty.

De Loignac had the signal sounded to saddle.

The roll-call made in a low tone, he found that the Forty-Five were there; not one was missing. To the light horse was entrusted the duty of taking prisoners Mayneville's men, and those of the duchess, with the warning, under penalty of death, not to address a single word to them. The King stepped into his coach, and placed his naked sword by his side.

Monsieur D'Épernon swore "*Parfandious*," and gallantly tried if his sword moved easily in its sheath.

Nine o'clock struck from the Donjon; they started.

One hour after the departure of Ernauton, Monsieur de Mayneville was still at the window, whence we saw him endeavor but in vain to follow the course of the young man in the darkness; but, the hour having glided away, he was much less calm, and somewhat more inclined to trust in the help of God, for he was beginning to think that the help of men was failing him.

Not one of his soldiers had appeared; the road, silent and black, resounded only at long intervals with the noise of horses going at full speed to Vincennes. At this sound, Monsieur de Mayneville and the duchess strove to penetrate the shadows with their glances in order to find their men, to guess something of what was taking place, or to discover the cause of the delay.

But these sounds having died away, everything was again silent.

This constant coming and going, without any result, had finally filled Mayneville with such anxiety that he had had one of the servants of the duchess mount his horse, with orders to gain information from the first company of horsemen he met.

The messenger had not returned. Seeing this, the impatient duchess had sent a second, who had returned no more than the first.

"Our officer," then said the duchess, still disposed to look at things in a hopeful light, "our officer has been afraid of not having men enough, and he is keeping the servants we send him as reënforcements; that is wise but alarming."

"Alarming, yes, very alarming," replied Mayneville, whose eyes had not left the dark and gloomy horizon.

"Mayneville, what can have happened?"

"I will mount a horse myself, and we shall know, madame."

And Mayneville made as though to leave.

"I forbid you to do so!" cried the duchess, detaining him. "Mayneville, who would remain with me? Who would know all our officers, all our friends, when the decisive moment comes? No, no, stay, Mayneville; one naturally imagines all sorts of things when a matter of this importance is at stake; but really the plan was too well arranged, and was kept too much of a secret, not to succeed."

"Nine o'clock," said Mayneville, replying to his own impatience rather than to the words of the duchess, "well! there

are the Jacobins coming out of their convent, and ranging themselves along the wall of the court; perhaps they have some private notice."

"Silence!" cried the duchess, raising her hand towards the horizon.

"What?"

"Silence; listen!"

A rumbling like that of thunder was beginning to be heard.

"It is the cavalry!" cried the duchess; "they are bringing him to us!"

And, according to her impetuous temperament, passing from the most cruel apprehension to the wildest joy, she clapped her hands, crying:

"I have him! I have him!"

Mayneville was still listening.

"Yes," said he, "yes; it is a coach coming, and galloping horses."

And he commanded in a loud voice:

"Outside the walls, monks, outside the walls!"

At once the great iron gate of the priory was hastily flung open, and the hundred armed monks, at the head of which walked Borromée, marched out.

They took their position across the road.

Then the voice of Gorenflot was heard shouting:

"Wait for me! wait for me! It is important that I be at the head of the chapter to receive his Majesty properly."

"On the balcony, lord prior! on the balcony!" cried Borromée, "you know very well that you must command all of us. The Scripture says, 'Thou shalt dominate as the cedar dominates the hyssop.'"

"That is true," said Gorenflot, "that is true. I had forgotten that I had chosen that post; fortunately you are here to remind me, Brother Borromée, fortunately."

Borromée gave a command in a low tone, and four monks, under the pretext of honor and ceremony, flanked the worthy prior to his balcony. Soon the road, which made a turn a short distance from the priory, was lighted by a number of torches, thanks to which the duchess and Mayneville could see cuirasses shine and swords glitter.

Incapable of restraining herself, the duchess cried:

"Go down, Mayneville, and bring him to me, bound and escorted by guards."

"Yes, yes, madame," said the gentleman, absentmindedly; "but one thing troubles me."

"What?"

"I do not hear the signal agreed on."

"Of what use is the signal, since they have him?"

"But they were to arrest him here, opposite the priory, it seems to me," insisted Mayneville.

"They found a better opportunity further away."

"I do not see our officer."

"I do."

"Where?"

"That red plume!"

"By Heavens, madame!"

"What?"

"That red plume!"

"Well?"

"That is Monsieur d'Épernon! Monsieur d'Épernon, sword in hand."

"They have left him his sword?"

"By Heavens! he commands."

"Our men? There is treason, then?"

"Well, madame, these are not our men."

"You are mad, Mayneville."

At that moment De Loignac, at the head of the first company of the Forty-Five, brandished a large sword and cried:

"Long live the King!"

"Long live the King!" enthusiastically replied the Forty-Five, with their formidable Gascon accent.

The duchess turned pale, and fell forward on the ledge of the window, as though she had fainted.

Mayneville, gloomy and resolute, grasped his sword. He did not know whether the men would invade the house as they passed or not.

The procession still advanced like a torrent of noise and light. It had reached Bel Esbat, it was approaching the priory.

Borromée took three steps forward. De Loignac pushed his horse straight towards this monk, who, in his woollen robe, seemed to offer battle.

But Borromée like an intelligent man saw that all was lost, and instantly made up his mind.

"Room! room!" cried De Loignac, roughly; "room for the King!"

Borromée, who had drawn his sword under his robe, put it back into its sheath, under his robe.

Gorenflot, stunned by the shouts and the noise of arms, and dazzled by the flare of the torches, extended his powerful right hand, and, the first and middle finger raised, blessed the King from the height of his balcony. Henry, leaning from the window of his coach, saw him, and bowed, smiling.

This smile, authentic proof of the favor which the worthy prior of the Jacobins enjoyed at court, electrified Gorenflot, who shouted in his turn a "Long live the King!" in tones capable of raising the arches of a cathedral.

But the rest of the convent remained silent. In fact, it had expected a very different end to the two months of drilling and the purchase of arms.

But Borromée, veritable trooper that he was, had with a glance estimated the number of the King's defenders, and recognized their warlike bearing. The absence of the partisans of the duchess showed him the fatal issue of the undertaking; to hesitate to submit, was to lose everything. He did not hesitate, but just as the breast of De Loignac's horse was about to knock him down, he cried, "Long live the King!" in a voice almost as sonorous as that to which Gorenflot had just given utterance.

Then the entire convent shouted, "Long live the King!" and brandished their arms.

"Thanks, reverend fathers, thanks!" cried the rasping voice of Henry III.

Then he passed in front of the convent which was to have been the limit of his drive like a whirlwind of fire, noise, and glory, leaving Bel Esbat behind him in the darkness.

From the height of her balcony, hidden by the shield of gilded iron, behind which she had fallen on her knees, the duchess saw, questioned, devoured each face, on which the torches threw their glaring light.

"Ah!" said she, with a cry, pointing out one of the cavaliers of the escort. "See, see, Mayneville!"

"The young man, the messenger of Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne, in the service of the King!" exclaimed the latter.

"We are lost!" murmured the duchess.

"We must flee, and at once, madame," said Mayneville; "conqueror to-day, to-morrow the Valois will abuse his victory."

"We have been betrayed!" cried the duchess; "that young man has betrayed us! He knew all!"

The King was already far away. He had disappeared with his entire escort under the Porte Saint Antoine, which opened before him and closed behind him.

CHAPTER XLIV.

HOW CHICOT BLESSED KING LOUIS THE ELEVENTH FOR HAVING INVENTED THE POST, AND HOW HE RESOLVED TO PROFIT BY THE INVENTION.

CHICOT, to whom our readers will allow us to return, after the important discovery which he had just made in untying the cords from the mask of Monsieur de Mayenne, had not an instant to lose in getting away as quickly as possible out of sound of the adventure.

Between the duke and himself it would henceforth be a deadly combat, as we can well understand. Wounded in his flesh, Mayenne, who to the old blows of the scabbard now joined the recent blow of the sword, would never forgive.

"Well! well!" cried the brave Gascon, hastening along the road in the direction of Beaugency, "now or never is the time to use on post horses the money collected from those three illustrious personages who are called Henry of Valois, Dom Modeste Gorenflot, and Sebastian Chicot."

Clever as he was in mimicking not only every sentiment but every condition as well, Chicot at once assumed the air of a great lord, as, under less precarious conditions, he had assumed that of a pleasant bourgeois. And never was prince served with greater zeal than Maître Chicot, when he had sold Ernauton's horse, and spoken for a quarter of an hour with the postmaster.

Once in the saddle, Chicot determined not to stop until he thought himself in a place of safety; therefore he galloped as fast as the horses of thirty relays would allow him. As for himself, he seemed made of steel, and at the end of sixty leagues, finished in twenty-four hours, did not appear to feel the slightest fatigue.

When, thanks to this haste, he had reached Bordeaux in

three days, Chicot thought that he might indeed be allowed to take a little breath.

One can think when one gallops; in fact, one can scarcely do anything but that.

Therefore Chicot thought a great deal.

His embassy, which grew more important the nearer he came to the end of his journey, appeared to him in a very different light, without our being able to say precisely in what light it did appear to him.

What prince was he going to find in this strange Henry, whom some thought a fool, others a coward, and every one an unimportant renegade?

But Chicot's opinion was not that of every one.

Since his stay in Navarre, Henry's character, like the skin of a chameleon, which assumes the color of the object upon which it happens to be, — Henry's character, on touching his native soil, had undergone some changes. Henry had known how to put sufficient space between the royal claw and this precious skin which he had saved so skilfully from all rent so as not to fear any further attacks.

However, his outward policy was always the same; he extinguished himself in the general uproar, extinguishing with him and around him some illustrious names, which, in the French world, one wondered to see reflecting their brightness on a pale crown of Navarre. As at Paris, he paid assiduous court to his wife, whose influence, at two hundred leagues from Paris, seemed, however, to have become null. In short, he vegetated, happy to live.

For the vulgar, he was a subject for hyperbolical jesting.

For Chicot, he was a subject for deep thought.

Chicot, little as he seemed to do so, naturally devined the hearts of others beneath their covering.

Henry of Navarre, therefore, was an enigma, though not a solved enigma.

To know that Henry of Navarre was an enigma and not a fact, pure and simple, was to know much already. Therefore Chicot knew more about him than any one, realizing, like the old sage of Greece, that he knew nothing. There where every one went about with open brow, free speech, his heart on his lips, Chicot felt that he must go with oppressed heart, prepared speeches, his brow wrinkled like that of an actor.

This need of dissimulation was suggested to him, first, by

his natural instinct, then by the aspect of the places through which he journeyed.

Once within the limits of this little principality of Navarre, a country the poverty of which was proverbial in France, Chicot, to his great surprise, ceased to see impressed on every face, on every house, on every stone, the mark of that hideous misery which was consuming the most beautiful provinces of the superb France he had just left.

The woodcutter who passed, his arm leaning on the yoke of his favorite ox; the girl with the short skirt and the quick gait, who carried water on her head in the manner of the chœphores of old; the old man singing a song of his youth, shaking his hoary head the while; the tame bird chattering in its cage and pecking at its full crib; the brown child, with thin but active limbs, playing on the carpet of wheat sheaves, — all spoke to Chicot a living language, clear, intelligent; all cried to him at every step:

"See, we are happy here!"

Sometimes, at the sound of wheels rumbling along the hollow roads, Chicot felt a sudden terror. He recalled the heavy artillery which cut up the roads of France. But at a turn of the road the wagon of a vintager came in sight, laden with casks and red-faced children. When from afar the barrel of a rifle made him open his eyes, behind a hedge of figs or vine-branches, Chicot thought of the three ambuscades from which he had so happily escaped. It was, however, only a hunter followed by his great dogs, crossing the plain full of hares to reach the mountain rich in red partridge and grouse.

Although the season was advanced and Chicot had left Paris full of fogs and hoar frost, it was warm, beautiful weather. The great trees had not yet lost their leaves, which in the south they never wholly shed, and from the height of their reddening domes threw a blue shadow over the chalky ground. The horizon, clear, pure, and free from clouds, was mirrored in the rays of the sun, variegated with villages of white houses.

The Béarnais peasant with cap tipped over one ear urged across the meadows the small horses (sold for three crowns), which, bounding untiringly on their legs of steel, make twenty leagues at a stretch, and never combed, never covered, shake themselves when they arrive at their goal, where they browse among the first clump of heather they reach, their one, but sufficient repast.

"*Ventre de biche!*" said Chicot, "I have never seen Gascony so rich. The Béarnais lives in clover. Since he is happy, there is every reason for supposing, as his brother the King of France says, that he is — good; but perhaps he does not admit it. In truth, although translated into Latin, the letter still troubles me; I almost want to translate it into Greek. But, bah! I have never heard that Henriot, as his brother Charles IX. called him, knew Latin. I will make a French translation of my Latin translation, *expurgata*, as they say at the Sorbonne."

And Chicot, in making these reflections to himself, asked aloud where the king was.

The king was at Nérac. At first they had thought him at Pau, which had induced our messenger to push on toward Mont-de-Marsan; but arrived in the latter place, the topography of the court had been rectified, and Chicot had set out to the left to take the road to Nérac, which he found full of people returning from the market at Condom.

They told him (Chicot, we must remember, very circumspect when it was necessary to reply to the questions of others, was a great questioner) — they told him, we say, that the King of Navarre led a very happy life, and that he did not rest in his perpetual transitions from one love to another.

Chicot, on the way, had made the pleasant acquaintance of a young Catholic priest, a sheep-dealer, and an officer, who were good company from Mont-de-Marsan, and who chatted, with much feasting, whenever they stopped.

These men seemed to him, by this wholly chance association, to represent Navarre, enlightened, commercial, military. The priest recited to him the sonnets which were made on the loves of the king and the beautiful Fosseuse, daughter of René de Montmorency, Baron of Fosseux.

"Well, well," said Chicot, "we must understand each other. They believe in Paris that his majesty the King of Navarre is in love with Mademoiselle Le Rebours."

"Oh!" said the officer, "that was at Pau."

"Yes, yes," echoed the priest, "that was at Pau."

"Ah! that was at Pau?" asked the merchant, who, as simple bourgeois, seemed the least well informed of the three.

"What!" said Chicot, "then the king has a mistress in every city?"

"That may be so," said the officer, "for, to my knowledge, he

was the lover of Mademoiselle Dayelle, while I was in garrison at Castelnaudary."

"Wait, wait," said Chicot; "Mademoiselle Dayelle, a Greek?"

"Yes," said the priest, "a Cypriote."

"Pardon, pardon," said the merchant, delighted to put in his word, "I am from Agen!"

"Well?"

"Well! I can answer for it that the king knew Mademoiselle de Tignonville at Agen."

"*Ventre de biche!*" exclaimed Chicot. "What a gay deceiver! But to return to Mademoiselle Dayelle, I knew the family"—

"Mademoiselle Dayelle was always jealous and threatening; she had a pretty little curved dagger which she kept on her work-table, and one day the king left, and took the dagger with him, saying that he did not want any mishap to come to the one who might succeed him."

"So that up to the present time his majesty belongs wholly to Mademoiselle le Rebours?" asked Chicot.

"On the contrary, on the contrary," said the priest, "they have fallen out. Mademoiselle le Rebours was daughter of the president, and, as such, somewhat too strong in law proceedings; she argued so much against the queen, thanks to the insinuations of the queen mother, that the poor girl fell ill. Then Queen Margot, who is no fool, had her advantage and determined that the king should leave Pau for Nérac, so that there was a love cut short."

"Then," said Chicot, "the new passion of the king is for La Fosseuse?"

"Oh, my God, yes; the more so as she is with child. It is madness."

"But what does the queen say?" asked Chicot.

"The queen?" said the officer.

"Yes, the queen."

"The queen lays her griefs at the foot of the cross," said the priest.

"Besides," added the officer, "the queen is ignorant of all these things."

"Oh!" said Chicot, "that is not possible."

"Why not?" asked the officer.

"Because Nérac is not such a large city that one cannot be plainly seen there."

Ah! as to that, monsieur," said the officer, "there is a park, and in this park paths more than three thousand feet in length, planted with cypress, plane trees, and magnificent sycamores; it is so dark that one cannot be seen ten feet away in broad daylight. Imagine what it is at night."

"And then the queen is very much occupied, monsieur," said the priest.

"Bah! occupied?"

"Yes."

"And with whom, if you please?"

"With God, monsieur," replied the priest, haughtily.

"With God!" exclaimed Chicot.

"Why not?"

"Ah! the queen is devoted?"

"Very."

"But there is no mass at the palace, I imagine," said Chicot.

"Then you are wrong in your imagining, monsieur. No mass! Do you take us for heathens? Know, monsieur, that if the king goes to church with his gentlemen, the queen has mass in a private chapel."

"The queen?"

"Yes, yes."

"Queen Marguerite?"

"Queen Marguerite, a proof of which is that I, unworthy priest, won two crowns for having twice officiated in this chapel. I preached a very fine sermon there on the text 'God has separated the wheat from the chaff.' It reads in the Gospel, 'God *will* separate,' but I thought, as the Gospel was written long ago, I thought that the thing had taken place."

"And the king knew of this sermon?" demanded Chicot.

"He heard it."

"Without being angry?"

"On the contrary, he greatly applauded it."

"You astound me," replied Chicot.

"It must be added," said the officer, "that they do not alone go to church and to mass, there are some good banquets at the château, without mentioning the promenades, and I think that nowhere in France are there more courtiers than in the streets of Nérac."

Chicot had obtained more information than he needed to form an entire plan.

He knew Marguerite from having seen her in Paris holding court, and he knew furthermore that if she were but little farsighted in love affairs, it was when she had some reason for putting a bandage over her eyes.

"*Ventre de biche!*" said he, "in faith, these paths of cypress and three thousand feet of darkness run disagreeably through my head I am going to tell the truth to Nérac, I who come from Paris, to people who have paths three thousand feet long, and such darkness that wives do not see their husbands walking there with their mistresses! By Heaven! they will cut me to pieces to teach me how to interrupt such charming promenades. Fortunately, I know the philosophy of the king, and I trust in it. Besides, I am an ambassador; my head is sacred. So forward!"

And Chicot continued his way.

Towards evening he entered Nérac, at the very hour of the promenades which so greatly occupied the King of France and his ambassador.

For the rest, Chicot was able to convince himself of the informality of the royal habits from the way in which he was given an audience.

A simple valet opened to him the doors of a rustic salon, the approaches to which were studded with flowers. Above this salon were the antechamber of the king and the room which he loved to occupy during the day, in which he gave those unimportant audiences of which he was so prodigal.

An officer, indeed, even a page, informed him when a visitor presented himself. This officer or page ran to find the king, wherever he might be. The king came at this mere invitation, and received the applicant.

Chicot was profoundly impressed by this wholly gracious informality. He thought the king good, honest, and deeply in love. This was his opinion still more, when from the end of a winding path bordered with flowering laurel he saw the King of Navarre coming, an old cap on his head, in a deep green doublet and gray boots, out of breath, a cup and ball in his hand.

Henry had a smooth brow, as though no care dared to brush it with a wing, a smiling mouth, and eyes sparkling with happiness and health.

As he approached, he pulled with his left hand the flowers along the border.

"Who wants to speak to me?" he asked of his page.

"Sire," replied the latter, "a man who seems to me half lord, half soldier."

Chicot overheard the last words, and advanced timidly.

"It is I, sire," said he.

"Ah!" cried the king, raising both arms to Heaven, "Monsieur Chicot in Navarre? Monsieur Chicot with us? *Ventre Saint Gris!* You are welcome, dear Monsieur Chicot."

"A thousand thanks, sire."

"Very much alive, thank God!"

"I hope so, at least, dear sire," said Chicot, transported with joy.

"Ah! by Heaven!" said Henry, "we will drink some Limoux wine together, and you shall tell me what you think of it. You really make me very happy, Monsieur Chicot; be seated."

And he pointed to a grassy bank.

"Never, sire," said Chicot, declining.

"So! Have you ridden two hundred leagues to come and see me, in order for me to let you stand? No, Monsieur Chicot, sit down, sit down; one can talk well only when seated."

"But, sire, the respect!"

"Respect, with us, in Navarre! You are crazy, my poor Chicot, and who, then, thinks of that?"

"No, sire, I am not crazy," replied Chicot; "I am an ambassador."

A slight frown passed over the king's brow; but it disappeared so quickly that Chicot, keen observer though he was, did not even see a trace of it.

"Ambassador," said Henry, with a surprise he strove to render simple; "ambassador from whom?"

"Ambassador from King Henry III. I come from Paris and from the Louvre, sire."

"Ah! that is different, then," said the king, rising from the grassy bench with a sigh. "Go, page, leave us. Send some wine to the first floor, to my room; no, to my cabinet. Come with me, Chicot, I will conduct you."

Chicot followed the King of Navarre. Henry walked more quickly than when he had returned through his path of laurels.

"What misery," thought Chicot, "to come and trouble this

honest man in his peace and ignorance! Bah! he will be philosophical, though."

CHAPTER XLV.

HOW THE KING OF NAVARRE GUESSED THAT *TURENNIUS* MEANT TURENNE AND *MARGOTA*, MARGOT.

The cabinet of the King of Navarre was not very sumptuous, as one may suppose. His Béarnais Majesty was not rich, and with the little he had, he did nothing foolish. This cabinet, with the state sleeping-room, occupied the whole right wing of the château; a corridor ran from the antechamber, or guard-room, and from the sleeping-room; this corridor led to the cabinet. From this spacious apartment, comfortably furnished, although without trace of royal luxury, the eyes looked out on magnificent meadows situated on the bank of the river.

Great willow and plane trees hid the course of the stream, without preventing the eyes from being dazzled from time to time when the river, issuing like a mythological god from its foliage, made the noonday sun glisten with its scales of gold, or the midnight moon with its draperies of silver. The windows, then, looked out upon this magical panorama, terminating in the distance in a chain of hills, somewhat burned by the sun, but which at evening bounded the horizon by violet tints of an admirable clearness, and on the other side on the court of the château.

Lighted thus from the east to the west, by this double row of windows corresponding one with another, red here, blue there, the apartment presented a magnificent appearance, when it lovingly reflected the early rays of the sun or the pearly azure of the rising moon. These natural beauties occupied Chicot less, it must be admitted, than the arrangement of the cabinet, the usual abode of Henry.

In each article of furniture the intelligent ambassador seemed indeed to seek a letter, and this with much more attention as the combination of these letters would give him the answer to the enigma which he had been trying so long to solve, and which he had been trying to solve more particularly during his journey.

The king seated himself, with his usual good nature and his eternal smile, in a great leather armchair with gilt nails and wire fringe; Chicot, to obey him, rolled opposite to him a folding-chair or rather a stool covered in the same manner and enriched with similar ornaments.

Henry looked fixedly at Chicot, smiling, as we have already said, but at the same time with an earnestness which a courtier would have found wearisome.

"You will find that I am very curious, dear Monsieur Chicot," began the king, "and my curiosity is stronger than myself; I have so long looked upon you as dead that, in spite of all the joy that your resurrection causes me, I cannot grow accustomed to the idea that you are alive. Why did you so suddenly disappear from this world?"

"Well! sire," said Chicot, with his customary freedom, "you disappeared from Vincennes. Each one vanishes according to his means, and especially his needs."

"You always did have more wit than any one else, dear Monsieur Chicot," said Henry, "and it is especially from this that I know I am not speaking to your shade."

Then assuming a serious air.

"But come," said he, "shall we put wit aside and speak of business?"

"If that does not weary your majesty too much, I am at your command."

The king's eyes shone.

"Weary me!" said he.

Then in another tone:

"It is true that I grow rusty here," he continued calmly; "but I am not weary, inasmuch as I have done nothing. Now to-day Henry of Navarre has greatly exercised his body here and there, but the king has not yet operated his mind."

"Sire, I am very glad of it," replied Chicot; "as the ambassador of a king, your relative and friend, I have some very delicate commissions to execute with your majesty.

"Speak quickly, then, for you arouse my curiosity."

"Sire"—

"Your letters of credit first. This is a useless formality, I know, since it concerns you; but, after all, I want to show you, that thorough Béarnais peasant that we are, we know our duty as king."

"Sire, I ask your majesty's pardon," replied Chicot, "but

everything I had in the way of letters of credit I drowned in the rivers, threw into the fire, scattered to the air."

"And why, dear Monsieur Chicot?"

"Because one does not travel when one sets out for Navarre, on an embassy, as one travels when one goes to buy cloth at Lyons, and because if one has the dangerous honor of carrying royal letters, one runs the risk of carrying them only to the dead."

"That is true," said Henry, with perfect good nature, "the roads are not safe, and in Navarre, in default of money, we are obliged to trust to the honesty of the peasants; but they are not great thieves."

"What!" cried Chicot, "why, they are lambs, they are little angels, but only in Navarre."

"Ah! ah!" said Henry.

"Yes, indeed, outside of Navarre, one meets wolves and vultures about every prey; I was a prey, sire, so that I had my vultures and my wolves."

"But they did not wholly devour you, I am glad to see."

"*Ventre de biche*, sire, it was not their fault! They did all they could in that respect. But they found me too tough, and could not cut into my skin. But sire, if you please, let us leave the details of my journey, which are idle matters, and return to our letter of credit."

"But since you have none, dear Monsieur Chicot," said Henry, "it appears to me quite useless to return to it."

"That is, I have not one now, but I had one."

"Ah, good! give it to me, Monsieur Chicot."

And Henry extended his hand.

"This is where the trouble is, sire," said Chicot; "I had a letter, as I have had the honor of telling your majesty, and few people could have had a better one."

"You lost it?"

"I hastened to destroy it, sire, for Monsieur de Mayenne was running after me to steal it from me."

"Cousin Mayenne?"

"In person."

"Fortunately he does not run very fast. Is he still growing fat?"

"*Ventre de biche!* Not just now, I presume."

"And why not?"

"Because in running, sire, he had the misfortune to over-

take me, and in the encounter, faith, he received a good sword-thrust."

"And the letter?"

"Not a shadow of it, thanks to the precaution which I had taken."

"Bravo! you were wrong not to want to tell me of your journey, Monsieur Chicot; tell me in detail, for it interests me greatly."

"Your majesty is very kind."

"But one thing troubles me."

"Which?"

"If this letter is destroyed for Monsieur de Mayenne, it is also destroyed for me; how, then, am I to know what my good brother Henry wrote me, since his letter no longer exists?"

"Pardon, sire; it exists in my memory."

"How so?"

"Before destroying it I learned it by heart."

"Excellent idea, Monsieur Chicot, excellent, and I recognize in it the wit of a countryman. You will recite it to me, will you not?"

"Willingly, sire."

"Just as it was, without changing anything?"

"Without giving a single wrong meaning to it."

"What do you say?"

"I say that I will tell it to you faithfully; although I do not understand the language, I have a good memory."

"What language?"

"The Latin language."

"I do not understand you," said Henry, with his clear glance fixed on Chicot, "you speak of the Latin language, of the letter"—

"No doubt."

"Explain yourself. Was the letter from my brother, then, written in Latin?"

"Well! yes, sire."

"Why in Latin?"

"Ah! sire, no doubt because the Latin is a bold language, a language that can say everything, the language with which Perseus and Juvenal perpetuated the foolishness and the errors of kings."

"Of kings?"

"And of queens, sire."

The brow of the king began to wrinkle in its wide orbit.

"I mean of emperors and empresses," said Chicot.

"You know Latin, then, Monsieur Chicot?" asked Henry, coldly.

"Yes, and no, sire."

"You are very fortunate if it is yes, for you have a great advantage over me, who do not know it; I never could go seriously to mass on account of this devilish Latin; so you understand it, do you?"

"I was taught to read it, sire, as well as Greek and Hebrew."

"That is very fortunate, Monsieur Chicot; you are a living book."

"Your majesty has found the word, a living book. They imprint a few pages in my memory, they despatch me whither they will; I arrive, they read me and understand me."

"Or they do not understand you."

"How so, sire?"

"Why! if they do not know the language with which you are imprinted."

"Oh! sire, kings know everything."

"That is what is said to the people, Monsieur Chicot, and what flatterers say to kings."

"Then, sire, it is useless for me to recite to your majesty the letter which I learned by heart, since neither of us would understand anything of it."

"Has not the Latin a great analogy to the Italian?"

"They say so, sire."

"And to the Spanish?"

"Very great, so I am told."

"Then let us try; I know a little Italian, my Gascon patois greatly resembles the Spanish, perhaps I may understand Latin without ever having studied it."

Chicot bowed.

"Your majesty commands, then?"

"That is, I beg you, dear Monsieur Chicot."

Chicot began with the following phrase, which he covered with all sorts of preambles:

"*Frater carissime,*

"*Sincerus amor quo te prosequebatur germanus noster Carolus nonus, functus nuper, colet usque regiam nostram et pectori meo pertinaciter adhæret.*"

Henry did not move an eyelash, but at the last word he stopped Chicot by a gesture.

"Either I am greatly mistaken," said he, "or they speak in this sentence of love, obstinacy, and of my brother Charles IX ?"

"I would not deny it," said Chicot; "Latin is such a beautiful language that all that might be contained in one phrase."

"Continue," said the king.

Chicot resumed.

The Béarnais listened with the same indifference to all the passages in which there was any reference to his wife and the Vicomte of Turenne; but at the last name:

"Does not *Turennius* mean Turenne ?" he asked.

"I think so, sire."

"And *Margota*, is not that the pet name which my brothers Charles IX. and Henry III. give to their sister, my well-loved wife Marguerite ?"

"I see nothing impossible in it," replied Chicot.

And he continued his recital to the end of the last phrase, without the king's face once having changed its expression. Finally he stopped at the peroration, the style of which he caressed with so sonorous an accent that one would have said it was a paragraph from the Verrines, or from the discourse on the poet Archias.

"Is it finished ?" asked Henry.

"Yes, sire."

"Well, it must be superb."

"Is it not, sire ?"

"What a misfortune that I understand only two words of it, *Turennius et Margota !* and yet" —

"An irreparable misfortune, sire, unless your majesty decides to have the letter translated by some scholar."

"Oh ! no," said Henry, quickly; "and you yourself, Monsieur Chicot, who have shown so much discretion in your embassy by destroying the original autograph, you would not advise me, would you, to deliver this letter to the public ?"

"I do not say that, sire."

"But you think it ?"

"I think, since your majesty asks me, that the letter from the King, your brother, recommended to me with such care, and sent to your majesty by a special envoy, contains here and there perhaps some good point by which your majesty might profit."

"Yes, but to confide these good points to any one, I must have perfect confidence in the person."

"Certainly."

"Well! do one thing," said Henry, as though illumined by an idea.

"What?"

"Go and find my wife Margota; she is learned. Recite the letter to her; she will understand it, surely. Then, very naturally, she will explain it to me."

"Ah! that is admirable!" cried Chicot, "and your majesty does just the right thing."

"Do I not? Go to her."

"I will run to her, sire."

"But do not change a word of the letter."

"That would be impossible for me; I should have to know Latin, and I do not know it; some barbarism at best."

"Go to her, my friend, go."

Chicot made inquiries as to how to find Madame Marguerite, and left the king, more convinced than ever that the latter was an enigma.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE ALLEY OF THE THREE THOUSAND FEET.

The queen occupied the other wing of the château, divided in almost the same way as that which Chicot had just left.

From that direction there was always some music to be heard, some plume to be seen floating about. The famous Alley of the Three Thousand Feet, which had been so much discussed, began at the very windows of Marguerite, and her eyes never lingered on any but pleasant objects, clusters of flowers, green bowers, etc.

One would have said that the poor princess strove by the sight of happy objects to chase away the many lugubrious ideas that dwelt among the depths of her thoughts. A Perigourdin poet — Marguerite in the provinces, as in Paris, was always the star of poets — a Perigourdin poet had composed a sonnet in her honor. "She wishes," he said, "by the care she takes to place a garrison in her heart, to chase away every sad memory."

Born at the foot of the throne, daughter, sister, and wife of a king, Marguerite had indeed suffered deeply.

Her philosophy, more boastful than that of the King of Navarre, was less solid, because it was only artificial and the result of study, while that of the king sprang from a natural source. Then Marguerite, philosopher that she was, or rather that she wished to be, had already let time and grief stamp their expressive furrows on her face.

Nevertheless, she still possessed remarkable beauty, beauty of physiognomy especially, that which least attracts among people of vulgar rank, but which is most pleasing among the eminent, to whom one is ever ready to grant the supremacy of physical beauty.

Marguerite had a bright and kindly smile, a gentle and brilliant eye, supple and caressing gestures. Marguerite, we have said, was still an adorable creature.

As a woman, she walked like a princess; as queen, she had the carriage of a charming woman.

So she was idolized at Nérac, whither she brought elegance, joy, and life.

She, a Parisian princess, had borne in patience her sojourn in the province; this was already a virtue with which the people of the provinces were greatly pleased.

Her court was not merely a court of gentlemen and ladies; every one loved her at once, as queen and as woman; and as a matter of fact, the harmony of her flutes and violins, like the odor and the leavings of her banquets, were for every one.

She knew how to make such use of time that each day brought her something, and so that none were lost for those about her.

Full of hatred for her enemies, but patient in order the better to avenge herself; feeling instinctively under the covering of carelessness and forbearance of Henry of Navarre his ill will for her and his constant realization of each one of her misdeeds; without relatives, without friends, Marguerite had grown accustomed to living with love, or at least with the semblance of love, and to replacing by poetry and comfort family, husband, and friends.

No one except Catharine de Medicis, no one except Chicot, no one except a few melancholy spirits who had returned from the sombre kingdom of death, no one could have told why Marguerite's cheeks were already so pale, why her eyes were

involuntarily drowned in unknown sorrows, why indeed that deep heart let its void be seen even in her glance that was once so expressive. Marguerite no longer had intimates.

The poor queen wished no more, since the others had sold her confidence and her happiness for money.

Therefore she walked alone, and this perhaps, without their suspecting it themselves, increased in the eyes of the Navarrese the dignity of her attitude, more clearly set off by her isolation.

For the rest, this ill humor which she felt in Henry was wholly instinctive, and came rather from her own consciousness of her wrongs than from the actions of the Béarnais.

Henry treated her like a daughter of France; he addressed her only with obsequious politeness, or with gracious ease; he acted towards her on every occasion and in all matters like a husband and a friend.

So the court of Nérac, like all other courts living in easy relations, overflowed in physical and moral harmonies.

Such were the studies and the reflections which Chicot, the most observing and the most scrupulous of men, made from appearances as yet very slight.

Instructed by Henry, he had at first presented himself at the palace, but he had found no one there.

Marguerite, they had told him, was at the end of the beautiful alley running parallel with the river, and he betook himself to this alley, which was the famous Alley of the Three Thousand Feet, through that of the oleanders.

When he had gone two-thirds down the alley he perceived at the end, beneath a bower of Spanish jasmine, broom, and clematis, a group covered with ribbons, feathers, swords, and velvet; perhaps all this beautiful frippery was somewhat worn and old fashioned; but for Nérac it was brilliant and dazzling. Even Chicot, who had come straight from Paris, was satisfied with a glance.

As a page of the king preceded Chicot, the queen, whose eyes wandered here and there with the constant restlessness of a melancholy heart, recognized the colors of Navarre and called him.

"What do you want, D'Aubiac?" she asked.

The young man, we might well say the child, for he was scarcely more than twelve years old, blushed, and bent his knee before Marguerite.

"Madame," said he in French, for the queen required that the patois be banished from all service and business matters, "a gentleman from Paris sent from the Louvre to his majesty the King of Navarre, and by him sent to you, desires to speak with your majesty."

A flush suddenly spread over the beautiful face of Marguerite; she turned quickly and with that painful sensation which on every occasion penetrates hearts long bruised.

Chicot stood motionless twenty feet from her.

Her subtle eyes recognized a well-known figure in his bearing and side face, for the Gascon was outlined against the yellow background of the sky; she left the circle, instead of commanding the newcomer to approach. However, in turning back to bid the company adieu, she made a sign with the tips of her fingers to one of the most richly dressed and handsomest of the gentlemen.

This adieu for all was really an adieu for one alone. But as the privileged cavalier seemed not without anxiety, in spite of the salutation which was meant to reassure him, and as the eye of a woman sees everything:

"Monsieur de Turenne," said Marguerite, "will you kindly say to the ladies that I will return in a moment?"

The handsome gentleman in the white and blue doublet bowed with more agility than an indifferent courtier would have done.

The queen advanced with rapid steps to Chicot, who, without moving a foot, had taken in the whole of the scene, so thoroughly in harmony with the phrases of the letter which he brought.

"Monsieur Chicot!" cried Marguerite, astonished, approaching the Gascon.

"At your majesty's feet," said Chicot. "Your majesty, always kind and always beautiful, and always queen at Nérac as at the Louvre."

"It is a miracle to see you so far from Paris, monsieur."

"Pardon me, madame, for it is not poor Chicot who had the idea of performing this miracle."

"I thought that you were dead."

"I pretended to be dead."

"What do you want with us, Monsieur Chicot; am I fortunate enough to be remembered in France as Queen of Navarre?"

"Oh! madame," said Chicot, smiling, "you may be sure we do not forget queens, when they are of your age, and have your beauty."

"They are still gallant at Paris?"

"The King of France," added Chicot, without replying to the last question, "even writes on this subject to the King of Navarre."

Marguerite blushed.

"He writes?" she asked.

"Yes, madame."

"And you have brought the letter?"

"No, not brought, for reasons which the King of Navarre will explain to you, but learned by heart and ready to repeat from memory."

"I understand. This letter was of importance, and you feared that it might be lost or stolen from you?"

"That is the truth, madame; now if your majesty will excuse me, but the letter was written in Latin."

"Oh! very well!" exclaimed the queen, "you know that I understand Latin."

"And the King of Navarre," asked Chicot, "does he understand it?"

"Dear Monsieur Chicot," replied Marguerite, "it is very difficult to know what the King of Navarre knows or does not know."

"Ah! ah!" said Chicot, happy to see that he was not the only one seeking for the answer to the enigma.

"If appearances are to be believed," continued Marguerite, "he knows it very slightly, for he never understands, or at least he does not seem to understand when I speak in this language to any one at court."

Chicot bit his lips.

"Ah! the devil!" said he.

"Have you repeated this letter to him?" asked Marguerite.

"It was to him it was addressed."

"And did he seem to understand it?"

"Only two words."

"Which ones?"

"*Turennius* and *Margota*."

"*Turennius* and *Margota?*"

"Yes, these two words are in the letter."

"Then what did he do?"

"He sent me to you, madame."

"To me?"

"Yes, saying that this letter seemed to contain too important matters to be translated by a stranger, and that he preferred it to be heard by you, who were the most beautiful of scholars and the most scholarly of beautiful women."

"I will listen to you, Monsieur Chicot, since it is the command of the king that I hear you."

"Thank you, madame; where will it please your majesty that I should speak?"

"Here; no, no, in my own apartments, rather; come to my cabinet, I beg you."

Marguerite looked earnestly at Chicot, who, out of pity for her, perhaps, had let her see in advance a corner of the truth.

The poor woman felt the need of a support, of a last return to love before undergoing the ordeal which threatened her.

"Vicomte," said she to Monsieur de Turenne, "your arm as far as the château. Precede us, Monsieur Chicot, I beg you."

CHAPTER XLVII.

MARGUERITE'S CABINET.

We would not be accused of describing only festoons and flowers, and of scarcely letting the reader escape through the garden; but like master, like lodgings, and if it has not been useless to describe the Alley of the Three Thousand Feet and Henry's cabinet, it may also be of some interest to describe the cabinet of Marguerite.

Parallel to that of Henry, with separate doors opening upon rooms and passages, with windows, complaisant and mute as the doors, closed by blinds with iron locks whose keys turned without noise, — such was the exterior of the queen's cabinet.

Within, modern furniture, hangings of the present fashion, pictures, enamels, china, costly arms, books and manuscripts in Greek, Latin, and French, piled on every table, birds in their cages, dogs on the rugs, a whole world, in fact, vegetable and animal, living a common life with Marguerite.

People of superior intellects or superabundant spirits can-

not walk alone in life; they accompany each of their feelings, each of their inclinations, with everything harmonious to them, and which their attractive force drops into the whirlpool, so that instead of having lived and felt like ordinary people, they have increased their sensations tenfold, and doubled their existence.

Certainly Epicurus is a hero for humanity; the pagans themselves did not understand him; he was a severe philosopher, but one who by force of willing that nothing should be lost in the sum of our means and resources procured, by his inflexible economy, pleasures for whoever, acting wholly spiritually or bestially, would have perceived nothing but privations or afflictions.

But we have inveighed a great deal against Epicurus without knowing him, and we have praised him a great deal, also without understanding those pious recluses of the Thebaid who annihilated the good in human nature by neutralizing the bad. Killing a man is killing his passions also, no doubt, but it is killing, nevertheless, a thing which God forbids with all his force and by all his laws.

The queen was a woman who understood Epicurus, in Greek, in the first place, which was the least of her merits; she occupied her life so well that from a thousand griefs she knew how to create a pleasure, which in her quality of Christian gave her the opportunity to bless God more often than another, let Him be called God or Theòs, Jehovah or Magog. All this digression clearly shows the necessity of our describing the apartments of Marguerite. Chicot was invited to be seated in a beautiful and comfortable armchair covered with tapestry representing Love scattering a cloud of flowers; a page, who was not D'Aubiac, but who was more beautifully and more richly dressed, offered some refreshments to the messenger. Chicot did not accept, but when the Vicomte de Turenne had left the room he began to recite with unfailing memory the letter from the King of France and Poland, by the grace of God.

We know this letter, which we read in the original at the same time as Chicot; we believe, therefore, that it is wholly useless to give a Latin translation of it.

Chicot recited the translation with the strangest possible accent, in order that the queen might be as long as possible in understanding it; but skilful as he was in disguising his own

work, Marguerite at once seized its meaning, and in no way concealed her fury and indignation.

As he advanced in the letter, Chicot sank deeper and deeper into the quagmire he had created for himself; at certain delicate passages he bent his head like a confessor embarrassed at what he hears; and in this play of features he had a great advantage, for he did not see the eyes of the queen flash and each of her nerves shrink at the open statements concerning her conjugal misdemeanors.

Marguerite was not ignorant of the keen ill humor of her brother. Numerous occasions had proved it to her; she knew also, for she was not a woman to dissemble anything to herself, she knew how much to rely on the pretexts which she had furnished, and on those which she could still furnish; so in proportion as Chicot read, the balance established itself in her mind between legitimate anger and reasonable fear.

To be indignant at the right time, to mistrust at the proper moment, to avoid danger by repelling injury, to prove injustice by profiting by advice, this was the great work which was going on in Marguerite's mind, while Chicot continued his epistolary recitation.

It must not be supposed that Chicot stood with his head continually bent down; he raised first one eye, then the other, and reassured himself by seeing that beneath her half-frowning brows the queen was making up her mind.

He therefore concluded with great tranquillity the salutations of the royal letter.

"By the holy communion!" said the queen, when Chicot had finished, "my brother writes prettily in Latin; what vehemence! what style! I should never have believed such strength was in him."

Chicot made a movement of his eyes, and opened his hands like a man who has the manner of approving out of politeness, but who does not understand.

"You do not understand?" said the queen, to whom every language was familiar, even that of mimicry. "I believed you, however, to be a good Latin scholar, monsieur."

"Madame, I have forgotten; all that I know to-day, all that remains to me of my former knowledge, is that the Latin has no article, that it has a vocative case, and that 'head' is of the neuter gender."

"Ah! indeed!" exclaimed a person, entering cheerfully and noisily.

Chicot and the queen turned at the same moment. It was the King of Navarre.

"What!" said Henry, approaching, "'head' in Latin is of the neuter gender, Monsieur Chicot? And why is it not of the masculine gender?"

"Ah, sire," said Chicot, "I know nothing about it, except that it surprises me as it does your majesty."

"And it surprises me also," said Margot, dreamily.

"It ought to be," said the King, "because it is now the man, and now the woman who is master, according to the temperament of the man or the woman."

Chicot bowed.

"That is certainly the best reason I know, sire," said he.

"So much the better. I am delighted to be a deeper philosopher than I thought. Now let us return to the letter; you must know, madame, that I am burning to hear the news from the court of France, and that is just what this good Monsieur Chicot brings me in an unknown language; without which"—

"Without which?" repeated Marguerite.

"Without which, I should be delighted, *ventre Saint Gris!* You know how much I like news, and especially scandal, which my brother Henry of Valois knows so well how to tell."

And Henry of Navarre sat down, rubbing his hands.

"Come, Monsieur Chicot," continued the King, with the manner of a man who is prepared thoroughly to enjoy himself, "you have recited this famous letter to my wife, have you not?"

"Yes, sire."

"Well! my love, tell me a little of what this famous letter contains."

"Do you not fear, sire," said Chicot, put at ease by the liberty of which the two crowned heads set him the example, "that this Latin in which the letter in question is written is an evil prognostic?"

"Why?" asked the King.

Then turning to his wife:

"Well, madame?" he demanded.

Marguerite pondered an instant, as though she was taking up, to comment on them one by one, the phrases which had fallen from Chicot's lips.

"Our messenger is right, sire," said she, when her examination was over and her mind made up, "the Latin is an evil prognostic."

"What!" cried Henry, "does this dear letter contain ugly news? Take care, my love, the King your brother is a scholar of great strength and exquisite politeness."

"Even when he had me insulted in my litter, which took place a few leagues from Sens, when I had left Paris to rejoin you, sire."

"When one has a brother of severe morals himself," said Henry, in the indefinable tone which was midway between jest and earnest, "a brother who is King, a brother punctilious"—

"Who ought to be so for the true honor of his sister, and of his house; for indeed, I do not suppose, sire, that if Catherine d'Albret, your sister, caused some scandal, that you would have the scandal reported by a captain of the guards."

"Oh, as for me," said Henry, "I am a patriarchal and gentle bourgeois; I am not king, or if I am, it is for fun, and in faith! I have fun. But the letter, the letter, since it is addressed to me, I want to know what it contains."

"It is a perfidious letter, sire."

"Bah!"

"Oh, yes, and it contains more calumnies than are necessary to embroil not only a husband with his wife, but a friend with all his friends."

"Oh! oh!" said Henry, sitting up straight and arming his face, naturally so frank and open, with affected defiance, "embroil a husband and wife, you and me, then!"

"You and me, sire."

"And in what respect, my love?"

Chicot felt himself on thorns, and he would have given much, although he was very hungry, to go to bed without supper.

"The cloud is about to burst!" he murmured to himself. "The cloud is about to burst!"

"Sire," said the queen, "I greatly regret that your majesty has forgotten the Latin, which you must have been taught, however."

"Madame, I no longer remember a thing of all the Latin I learned except this phrase: *Deus et virtus æterna;* a singular combination of the masculine, feminine, and neuter, which

my professor could never explain except by the Greek, which I understood still less than Latin."

"Sire," continued the queen, "if you understood, you would see in the letter a great many compliments of all kinds to me."

"Oh! very good," said the king.

"*Optime*," said Chicot.

"But how," said Henry, "can compliments to you embroil us, madame? for indeed, so long as my brother Henry pays you compliments, I shall agree with my brother Henry; if evil were said of you in this letter, ah! that would be a different thing, madame, and I should understand the policy of my brother."

"Ah! if evil were said of me, you would understand Henry's policy?"

"Yes, Henry of Valois'; he has reasons for embroiling us, which I well know."

"Wait, then, sire, for these compliments are nothing but an insinuating exordium to arrive at calumniating insinuations against your friends and mine."

And having boldly uttered these words, Marguerite waited for a contradiction.

Chicot lowered his head; Henry shrugged his shoulders.

"See, my love," said he, "if after all you have not understood the Latin too well, and if this evil intention is really in your brother's letter."

Gently and impressively as Henry uttered these words, the Queen of Navarre shot at him a glance full of mistrust.

"Understand me to the end, sire," said she.

"I ask nothing better, madame, God is my witness," replied Henry.

"Have you need or not of your subjects, come?"

"Have I need of them, my love? What a question! What should I do without them, and reduced to my own strength, my God!"

"Well! sire, the King wishes to detach from you your best subjects."

"I defy him to do so."

"Bravo, sire!" murmured Chicot.

"Ah! no doubt," said Henry, with that astonishing good nature which was so peculiar to him, by which, to the end of his life, every one let himself be caught; "for my servants are

attached to me from love and not from interest. I have nothing to give them.'

"You give them all your heart, all your faith, sire; it is the best return from a king to his friends."

"Yes, my love; well?"

"Well, sire, have no more faith in them."

"*Ventre Saint Gris!* I shall take away my faith only if they force me to do so; that is, if they do not deserve it."

"Good, then," said Marguerite, "we will prove to you that they do not deserve it, sire, that is all."

"Ah! ah!" said the king, "but in what respect?"

Chicot again lowered his head, as he did at every delicate point.

"I cannot tell you that, sire," replied Marguerite, "without compromising" —

And she looked around her.

Chicot understood that he embarrassed her, and drew back.

"Dear messenger," said the king to him, "be good enough to wait for me in my cabinet; the queen has something private to say to me, something very useful for my service, apparently."

Marguerite remained motionless, with the exception of a slight nod of the head which Chicot thought he alone caught. Seeing, therefore, that he would please both husband and wife by withdrawing, he rose and left the chamber, with a final bow directed to both.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

COMPOSITION IN TRANSLATION.

To eliminate this witness whom Marguerite supposed stronger in Latin than he wished to admit was already a triumph, or at least a pledge of security for her, for, as we have said, Marguerite did not believe Chicot as uneducated as he wished to appear, while all alone with her husband, she could give to each Latin word more scope or commentary than all the scholiasts in us ever gave to Plautus or Perseus, those two enigmas in epic verse of the Latin world.

Henry and his wife, therefore, had the satisfaction of a tête-à-tête. The king wore on his face no appearance of

anxiety, nor any suspicion of foreboding. Decidedly the king did not understand Latin.

"Monsieur," said Marguerite, "I am waiting for you to question me."

"This letter is troubling you greatly, my love," said he; "do not be so alarmed about it."

"Sire, it is because the letter is or ought to be an event; a king does not send a messenger to another king in this way except for reasons of the greatest importance."

"Well, then," said Henry, "let us leave the message and the messenger, my love. Have you not something like a ball on hand for this evening?"

"We had planned one, sire," said Marguerite, surprised, "but there is nothing unusual in that. You know that we dance almost every evening."

"I have a great hunt on hand for to-morrow, a great hunt."

"Ah!"

"Yes, a battle of wolves."

"Each of us has our pleasure, sire; you love the hunt, I the ball; you hunt, I dance."

"Yes, my love," said Henry, sighing; "and, in truth, there is no harm in that."

"Certainly not, but your majesty says it with a sigh."

"Listen to me, madame."

Marguerite became all attention.

"I am troubled."

"About what, sire?"

"About a rumor which is going around."

"A rumor? Your majesty is troubled over a rumor?"

"What more natural, my love, when this rumor may cause you pain?"

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

"Sire, I do not understand you."

"Have you heard nothing?" said Henry in the same tone.

Marguerite began to tremble seriously lest this was a mode of attack on the part of her husband.

"I am the most curious woman in the world, sire," said she, "and I never hear what they din into my ears. Moreover, I put so little value on what you call these rumors that I scarcely hear them even when listening; all the more reason, then, for me to close my ears when they pass."

"It is your opinion, then, madame, that we should ignore all these rumors?"

"Absolutely, sire, and especially we royal people."

"Why we especially, madame?"

"Because we, being on every tongue, should indeed have too much to do if we troubled about ourselves."

"Well, I think that you are right, my love, and I will give you an excellent opportunity to apply your philosophy."

Marguerite thought the decisive moment had come. She summoned all her courage, and in a firm voice said:

"So be it, sire, with the greatest pleasure."

Henry began in the tone of a penitent who has some great sin to confess:

"You know the great interest which I take in my little maid Fosseuse?"

"Ah! ah!" cried Marguerite, seeing that it was not a question of herself, and assuming an air of triumph; "yes, yes, in little Fosseuse, your friend."

"Yes, madame," replied Henry, still in the same tone, "yes, in little Fosseuse."

"My maid of honor?"

"Your maid of honor."

"Your folly, your love."

"Ah! you speak now, my love, like one of those rumors you were reviling just now."

"That is true, sire," said Marguerite, "and I humbly beg your pardon for it."

"My love, you are right; public rumor often lies, and we have, we royal people especially, great need of establishing this theorem as an axiom. *Ventre Saint Gris!* madame, I believe I am speaking Greek."

And Henry burst out laughing.

Marguerite read irony in this noisy laughter, and especially in the sharp glance which accompanied it.

Some anxiety seized her.

"Fosseuse, then?" said she.

"Fosseuse is ill, my love; and the physicians understand nothing about her malady."

"That is strange, sire. Fosseuse, according to the words of your majesty, has always been virtuous; Fosseuse, who, according to you, would have resisted a king had a king spoken to her of love, Fosseuse, that flower of purity, that limpid crys-

tal, must let the eye of science penetrate to the depths of her joys and her griefs!"

"Alas! it is not so," said Henry, sadly.

"What!" exclaimed the queen, with that impetuous spitefulness which the most superior woman never fails to hurl like a dart at another woman; "what! Fosseuse is not a flower of purity?"

"I did not say that," replied Henry, drily; "God keep me from accusing any one! I say my friend Fosseuse is attacked by a malady which she obstinately hides from the physicians."

"From the physicians? Yes; but from you, her confidant, her friend, — that seems very strange to me."

"I do not know much about it, my love," replied Henry, resuming his gracious smile, "or if I know much about it, I think best to stop at that."

"Then, sire," said Marguerite, who believed she guessed from the tone of the conversation that she had the advantage, and that it was for her to grant forgiveness, when, on the contrary, she had thought to beg for it, "then, sire, I do not know what your majesty desires, and I wait for you to explain yourself."

"Well, since you wait for me, my love, I will tell you everything."

Marguerite made a sign showing that she was ready to hear everything.

"You must" — continued Henry, "but it is asking too much of you, my love" —

"Nevertheless, tell me, sire."

"You must have the kindness to go to my dear Fosseuse."

"I visit this girl, who, they say, has the honor of being your mistress, an honor which you do not deny?"

"Come, come, gently, my love," said the King. "On my word, you would cause a scandal with these exclamations, and I do not really know whether the scandal which you might cause would not delight the court of France, for in this letter from the King, my brother-in-law, which Chicot recited to me, there was *quotidie scandalum*, that is, for a sad humanist like myself, daily scandal."

Marguerite made a movement.

"One need not know Latin for that," continued Henry; "it is almost French."

"But, sire, to whom could these words be applied?" asked Marguerite.

"Ah! that is what I could not understand. But you who know Latin, you can help me when we reach that point, my love."

Marguerite blushed to her ears, while, with head lowered and hand raised, Henry looked as though he were simply trying to find out to what person at court the *quotidie scandalum* could be applied.

"Well, monsieur," said the queen, "you wish in the name of peace to urge me to a humiliating step; in the name of peace I will obey."

"Thank you, my love," said Henry, "thank you."

"But this visit, monsieur; what is its object?"

"It is very simple, madame."

"Still I shall have to be told, since I am simple enough not to guess it."

"Well, you will find Fosseuse in the midst of the maids of honor, lying down in their room. These women, you know, are so curious and so indiscreet that no one knows to what extremity Fosseuse may be driven."

"But she fears something, then?" cried Marguerite, with an increase of anger and hatred; "she is anxious to hide?"

"I do not know," said Henry; "what I do know is that she must leave the chamber of the maids of honor."

"If she wishes to hide, she need not count on me; I can close my eyes to some things, but I will never be an accomplice to them."

And Marguerite awaited the effect of her ultimatum.

But Henry seemed to have heard nothing; he had let his head fall forward again, and had resumed that pensive attitude which had struck Marguerite an instant before.

"*Margota*," he murmured, "*Margota cum Turennio.* Those are the two words I am trying to understand, madame, *Margota cum Turennio.*"

This time Marguerite grew crimson.

"Calumnies! sire," she cried, "are you going to repeat calumnies to me?"

"What calumnies?" said Henry, in the most natural tone in the world; "do you see calumnies in that, madame? It is a passage from my brother's letter which comes back to me: *Margota cum Turennio conveniunt in castello nomine Loignac.*

Decidedly I shall be obliged to have this letter translated by a scholar."

"Come, let us cease this play, sire," said Marguerite, trembling, "and tell me frankly what you expect of me."

"Well, I did want you, my love, to take Fosseuse away from the maids, put her in a room by herself, and send her only one physician, a discreet physician, yours, for instance."

"Oh! I see how it is!" exclaimed the queen, "Fosseuse, who extolled her virtue, Fosseuse, who boasted of assumed modesty, Fosseuse is with child, and is about to be confined."

"I do not say that, my love," said Henry. "I do not say that; it is you who affirm it."

"That is it, monsieur, that is it!" cried Marguerite; "your insinuating tone, your false humility, prove it to me. But there are sacrifices which one, king though he be, does not demand of his wife. Undo yourself the wrongs to Mademoiselle de Fosseuse, sire; you are her accomplice; this concerns you. To the guilty the punishment, and not to the innocent."

"To the guilty, good! that again reminds me of the words of that frightful letter."

"How so?"

"Yes, guilty is *nocens*, is it not?"

"Yes, monsieur, *nocens*."

"Well! There is in the letter: *Margota cum Turennio, ambo nocentes, conveniunt in castello nomine Loignac.* My God! how sorry I am that my mind is not as educated as my memory is faultless!"

"*Ambo nocentes*," repeated Marguerite, in a low tone, paler than her lace collar; "he understands, he understands."

"*Margota cum Turennio, ambo nocentes.* What the devil did my brother mean by *ambo?*" went on Henry of Navarre, pitilessly. "*Ventre Saint Gris!* my love, it is very surprising that, knowing Latin as you do, you have not yet given me the explanation of this phrase which troubles me."

"Sire, I have had the honor of already telling you" —

"Well! by Heaven!" interrupted the King; "there is *Turennius* walking under your windows, and looking up as though he were waiting for you, poor fellow. I will sign to him to come up; he is very learned and can tell me what I want to know."

"Sire! sire!" cried Marguerite, rising in her chair and

clasping her hands; "sire, be greater than all these mischief-makers and slanderers of France."

"Well! my love, we are no more indulgent in Navarre than in France, it seems to me, and just now you yourself were very severe in regard to poor Fosseuse."

"Severe, I!" cried Marguerite.

"Well! I appeal to your memory; in this, however, we ought to be indulgent, madame; we lead such a peaceful life, you at the balls which you love, I in the hunt which I adore"—

"Yes, yes, sire," said Marguerite, "you are right, let us be indulgent."

"Oh! I was very sure of your heart, my love."

"It is because you know me, sire."

"Yes. You will go and see Fosseuse, then, will you not?"

"Yes, sire."

"And take her away from the other maids?"

"Yes, sire."

"And give her your own physician?"

"Yes, sire."

"And no nurse. Physicians are discreet by profession, nurses are talkative from habit."

"That is true, sire."

"And if, unfortunately, what they say is true, and that the poor girl has really been weak and succumbed"—

Henry raised his eyes to Heaven.

"Which is possible," he continued. "Woman is a fragile thing, *res fragilis mulier*, as the Gospel says."

"Well, sire, I am a woman, and know the indulgence which I should have for other women."

"Ah! you know everything, my love; in truth, you are a model of perfection and"—

"And?"

"And I will kiss your hands."

"But believe me, sire," said Marguerite, "it is for love of you alone that I make such a sacrifice."

"Oh! oh!" said Henry, "I know you perfectly, madame, and my brother in France also, who speaks so well of you in this letter, and who adds: *Fiat sanum exemplum statim, atque res certior eveniet.* This good example, no doubt, my love, is the one you give."

And Henry kissed the half-frozen hand of Marguerite.

Then pausing on the threshold:

"A thousand kindnesses from me to Fosseuse, madame," said he; "take care of her as you have promised me to do. As for me, I go to hunt; perhaps I shall not see you until my return, perhaps never — those wolves are treacherous beasts; come, let me embrace you, my love."

He embraced Marguerite almost affectionately, and went away leaving her stupefied at everything she had just heard.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE SPANISH AMBASSADOR.

The king rejoined Chicot in his cabinet.

Chicot was still thoroughly agitated with fears as to the explanation.

"Well, Chicot," said Henry.

"Well, sire," replied Chicot.

"You do not know what the queen pretends?"

"No."

"She pretends that your cursed Latin will cause trouble to our entire household."

"Well, sire," exclaimed Chicot, "for God's sake let us forget this Latin, and all will be said. It is not with a bit of recited Latin as with a bit of written Latin; the wind carries away the one, fire cannot always succeed in destroying the other."

"As far as I am concerned, I shall think no more about it, or the devil take me."

"Good!"

"I have something besides that to attend to."

"Your majesty prefers to be amused, eh?"

"Yes, my son," said Henry, rather vexed at the tone in which Chicot had uttered these few words; "yes, my majesty prefers to be amused."

"Pardon me, but perhaps I annoy your majesty?"

"Well! my son," said Henry, shrugging his shoulders, "I have already told you that it is not here as it is at the Louvre. Here we make love, war, and politics openly."

The glance of the king was so gentle, his smile so sweet, that Chicot felt himself emboldened.

"War and politics less than love, is it not, sire?" said he.

"Faith, yes, my dear friend, I admit it; this country is so beautiful, these wines of Languedoc so savory, these women of Navarre so beautiful!"

"Ah! sire," said Chicot, "you forget the queen, it seems to me; are the Navarre women more beautiful and more lovely than she? In that case I congratulate the women of Navarre."

"*Ventre Saint Gris!* You are right, Chicot, I forget that you are ambassador, that you represent King Henry III., that King Henry III. is brother to Madame Marguerite, and that consequently, before you, for propriety's sake, I ought to place Madame Marguerite above all women! But you must excuse my imprudence, Chicot; I am not used to ambassadors, my son."

At that moment the door of the cabinet opened, and D'Aubiac announced in a loud voice:

"Monsieur the Spanish Ambassador."

Chicot made a spring from his chair which brought a smile to the king's face.

"Faith," said Henry, "here is an interruption which I did not expect. What the devil is the Spanish ambassador coming here for?"

"Yes," repeated Chicot, "what the devil is he coming here for?"

"We shall see," said Henry; "perhaps our Spanish neighbor has some contest concerning the frontier to discuss with me."

"I will retire," said Chicot, humbly. "It is no doubt some real ambassador whom his majesty Philip II. has sent you, while as to me" —

"The French ambassador give way to the Spanish, and in Navarre! *Ventre Saint Gris!* that cannot be. Open this library, Chicot, and enter."

"But from there I shall hear everything in spite of myself, sire."

"And you shall hear, by Heaven! What difference does it make? I have nothing to hide. By the way, you have nothing further to tell me from the King your master, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur?"

"No, sire, absolutely nothing."

"Very well, then you have nothing further to do except to see and hear, as all the ambassadors on earth do; you will therefore be finely fixed in this library to fulfil your duty.

See with all your eyes and hear with all your ears, my dear Chicot."

Then he added:

"D'Aubiac, tell my captain of the guards to admit the Spanish ambassador."

Chicot, hearing this order, hastened to enter the library, and carefully drew the figured tapestry.

A slow, measured footstep fell on the resounding floor; it was that of the ambassador of his majesty Philip II. When the preliminaries devoted to the details of etiquette were over, and when Chicot had been able to convince himself, from the depths of his hiding-place, that the Béarnais thoroughly understood how to give an audience:

"You may speak, monsieur," said the Béarnais.

Chicot opened two large ears. The interest was great for him.

"Sire," said the ambassador, "I bring the answer from his Catholic majesty."

"Good!" said Chicot. "If he brings the reply, there must have been a demand."

"On what subject?" demanded Henry.

"Concerning your overtures of last month, sire."

"Faith, I am very forgetful," said Henry. "Kindly recall to me what those overtures were, I beg you, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur."

"Regarding the encroachments of the Lorraine princes in France."

"Yes, and especially in regard to those of my friend De Guise. Very good! I remember now. Continue, monsieur, continue."

"Sire," said the Spaniard, "the king my master, although urged to sign a treaty of alliance with Lorraine, has regarded an alliance with Navarre as more loyal, and, to speak frankly, more advantageous."

"Yes, to speak frankly," said Henry.

"I will be frank with your majesty, sire, for I know the intentions of the king my master in regard to your majesty."

"And I, may I know them?"

"Sire, the king my master has nothing to refuse to Navarre.

Chicot pressed his ear to the tapestry, and bit the end of his finger to make sure that he was not asleep.

"If they will refuse me nothing," said Henry, "let us see what I may demand."

"Whatever pleases your majesty, sire."

"The devil!"

"Speak openly and frankly, then."

"*Ventre Saint Gris!* everything, that is embarrassing!"

"His majesty the King of Spain wishes to put his new ally at ease; the proposition which I am about to make to your majesty will prove it."

"I am listening," said Henry.

"The King of France treats the Queen of Navarre as a sworn enemy; he repudiates her as sister from the moment he covers her with opprobium, that is certain. The insults of the King of France, and I ask pardon of your majesty for broaching this very delicate subject" —

"Broach it, broach it."

"The insults of the King of France are public; notoriety has consecrated them."

Henry made a movement of denial.

"There is notoriety," continued the Spaniard, "since we are informed; I therefore repeat, sire, the King of France repudiates Madame Marguerite for his sister, since he tried to insult her by having her litter stopped publicly, and by having her searched by a captain of the guards."

"Well! Monsieur l'Ambassadeur, to what are you coming?"

"Nothing is simpler, in consequence, for your majesty than to repudiate for wife the woman whom her brother repudiates for sister."

Henry glanced towards the tapestry, behind which Chicot, with startled eyes, waited, trembling, for the result of so momentous a beginning.

"The queen repudiated," went on the ambassador, "the alliance between the King of Navarre and the King of Spain" —

Henry bowed.

"This alliance," continued the ambassador, "is wholly concluded, and in this way: the King of Spain gives the infanta, his daughter, to the King of Navarre, and his majesty himself marries Madame Catherine of Navarre, your majesty's sister."

A shiver of pride ran through the body of the Béarnais; a shiver of fear through the body of Chicot. The one saw rising on the horizon his fortune as radiant as the morning sun; the

other saw descending and dying the sceptre and the fortune of the Valois.

The Spaniard, impassive and cold, saw nothing except the instructions of his master. For an instant there was a profound silence; then the King of Navarre went on:

"The proposition, monsieur, is magnificent, and covers me with honor."

"His majesty," the proud negotiator, who counted on an enthusiastic acceptance, hastened to say, "his majesty the King of Spain proposes to submit to your majesty but one condition."

"Ah! a condition," said Henry, "that is only fair; let us hear the condition."

"In aiding your majesty against the Lorraine princes, that is, in opening the way to the throne to your majesty, my master desires to facilitate by your alliance a means of keeping Flanders, at which my lord the Duke of Anjou is biting with all his teeth. Your majesty well knows that this is a great preference given to you by my master over the Lorraine princes, since the De Guises, his natural allies as Catholic princes, alone make a party against Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou in Flanders. But this is the condition, the only one; it is reasonable and easy: his majesty the King of Spain will ally himself with you by a double marriage, he will aid you to" — the ambassador paused an instant for the proper word — "to succeed the King of France, and you will guarantee Flanders to him. I may now, therefore, knowing the wisdom of your majesty, regard my negotiation as happily concluded."

A silence, still more profound than the former, succeeded these words, in order no doubt to let come in all its power the answer with which the exterminating angel was expecting to strike France or Spain.

Henry of Navarre took three or four steps in his cabinet.

"So, monsieur," said he, finally, "that is the answer which you are charged to bring me?"

"Yes, sire."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing more."

"Well!" said Henry, "I refuse the offer of his majesty the King of Spain."

"You refuse the hand of the infanta?" cried the Spaniard, with a pang like that which is caused by the pain of a wound one does not expect.

"A very great honor," replied Henry, raising his head, "but which I cannot believe greater than that of having married a daughter of France."

"Yes, but this first alliance brought you near the tomb, sire; the second will bring you near the throne."

"Precious, incomparable fortune, monsieur, I know, but one which I would never buy with the blood and the honor of my future subjects. What! monsieur, should I draw the sword against the King of France, my brother-in-law, for the Spanish stranger? What! should I stop the standard of France on its road to glory, to let the towers of Castile and the lions of Leon finish the work which it has begun? What! should I have brothers killed by brothers; and lead the stranger into my country? Monsieur, listen well to this: I asked of my neighbor the King of Spain for aid against the De Guises, who are factionists greedy for my inheritance, — but not against the Duc d'Anjou, my brother-in-law; not against Henry III., my friend; not against my wife, the sister of my King. You will aid the De Guises, you say, you will lend them your support? Do so; I will hurl at you all the Protestants of Germany and France. The King of Spain wishes to reconquer Flanders, which is slipping from him; let him do as his father Charles V. did; let him demand passage from the King of France to go and reclaim his title of first citizen of Ghent, and King Henry III., I will be his guarantee, will give him a passage as loyal as did King Francis I. 'I desire the throne of France,' says his Catholic majesty. It is possible; but I do not need him to help me win it; I will take it entirely by myself, if it is vacant, and that in spite of every majesty in the world. Adieu, then, adieu, monsieur! say to my brother Philip that I am very grateful to him for his offers. But I should be mortally offended with him, if in making them he had thought me for a single instant capable of accepting them. Adieu, monsieur."

The ambassador stood petrified; at last he stammered:

"Take care, sire, the good understanding between two neighbors is undone by a wrong word."

"Monsieur l'Ambassadeur," said Henry, "know this: the King of Navarre or King of nothing, is all one to me. My crown is so light that I should not even feel it fall if it slipped from my brow; but, just at present, I am thinking of keeping it, you may be sure. Adieu once more, monsieur; say to the

king your master that I have ambitions greater than those of which he has given me a glimpse. Adieu!"

And the Béarnais, again becoming, not himself, but the man he was supposed to be, after having for an instant let himself be dominated by the warmth of his heroism, the Béarnais smilingly and courteously conducted the ambassador to the threshold of his cabinet.

CHAPTER L.

THE POOR OF THE KING OF NAVARRE.

Chicot was plunged in so profound a surprise that, when Henry was alone, he did not think of leaving the library. The Béarnais raised the tapestry and touched him on the shoulder.

"Well, Maître Chicot," said he, "how do you think I got out of it?"

"Wonderfully, sire," replied Chicot, still amazed. "But truly, for a king who does not often receive ambassadors, it seems that when you do receive them you receive them well."

"Yet it is my brother Henry to whom I owe these ambassadors."

"How so, sire?"

"Yes; if he were not constantly persecuting his poor sister, others would not think of persecuting her. Do you suppose that if the King of Spain had not known of the public insult offered to the Queen of Navarre, when a captain of the guards searched her litter, do you suppose that he would propose that I should repudiate her?"

"I see, with pleasure, sire," replied Chicot, "that all their attempts will be useless, and that nothing will destroy the pleasant harmony which exists between you and the queen."

"Well! my friend, the interest they take in embroiling us is very evident."

"I confess to you, sire, that I am not as penetrating as you imagine."

"No doubt all that my brother Henry desires is that I should repudiate his sister."

"How so? Explain matters to me, I beg you. The deuce! I did not think I was coming to such a good school."

"You know that they have forgotten to pay me my wife's dowry, Chicot?"

"No, I did not know it, sire, but I suspected it."

"That this dowry consisted of three hundred thousand crowns of gold?"

"A pretty sum."

"And of several towns as security, among them that of Cahors."

"A pretty city, by Heaven!"

"I have put in a claim, not for my three hundred thousand crowns of gold, — poor as I am, I claim to be richer than the King of France, — but Cahors."

"Ah! you have claimed Cahors, sire? *Ventre de biche!* you have done well, and in your place I should have done the same."

"And that is why," said the Béarnais, with his shrewd smile, "that is why — you understand now?"

"No, the devil take me!"

"That is why they wish to make trouble between me and my wife, so that I will repudiate her. No wife, you understand, Chicot, no dowry, consequently no three hundred thousand crowns, no cities, and especially no Cahors. It is one of the several ways of eluding his promise, and my brother of Valois is very clever in this kind of snare."

"But you would greatly like to have this town, would you not, sire?" said Chicot.

"No doubt, for after all, what is my kingdom of Béarn? — a poor little principality which the avarice of my brother-in-law and mother-in-law has cut off to such a degree that the title of king which is attached to it has become a title of ridicule."

"Yes, while Cahors added to this principality" —

"Cahors would be my boulevard, the safeguard of my religion."

"Well! my dear sire, make up your mind to the loss of Cahors; for whether you quarrel with Madame Marguerite or not, the King of France will never give it back to you unless you take it."

"Oh!" cried Henry, "I would readily take it, if it were not so strong, and especially if I did not hate war."

"Cahors is impregnable, sire," said Chicot.

Henry armed his face with impenetrable innocence.

"Oh! impregnable, impregnable," said he; "but if I only had an army — which I have not."

"Listen, sire," said Chicot, "we are not here to say sweet things to each other. Between Gascons, you know, we speak frankly. To take Cahors, where Monsieur de Vesin is, one must be a Hannibal or a Cæsar, and your majesty"—

"Well, my majesty?" said Henry, with his cunning smile.

"Your majesty has said you do not like war."

Henry sighed; a flash of light illumined his eye full of melancholy; but at once restraining this involuntary movement, he smoothed his brown beard with his hand tanned by the sun.

"Never have I drawn a sword, it is true; never shall I draw one. I am a straw king, and a man of peace; but, Chicot, by a singular contrast, I like to talk about matters of war. It is in my blood. Saint Louis, my ancestor, had this good fortune, that, although pious by education and gentle by nature, he became at times a fierce tilter with the lance, and a valiant swordsman. Let us speak, if you will, Chicot, of Monsieur Vesin, who is a Cæsar and a Hannibal."

"Sire, pardon me," said Chicot, "if I have not only wounded you, but troubled you. I spoke to you of Monsieur de Vesin merely to extinguish every trace of foolish ardor which youth and ignorance of affairs might arouse in your heart. Cahors, you see, is so well defended, and so carefully guarded, because it is the key to the south."

"Alas!" said Henry, sighing more deeply, "I well know it."

"It is," continued Chicot, "territorial richness joined to security of habitation. To have Cahors is to possess granaries, cellars, strong boxes, barns, lodgings, and connections; to possess Cahors is to have everything for one's self; not to possess Cahors is to have everything against one."

"Ah! *Ventre Saint Gris!*" murmured the King of Navarre; "that is why I was so anxious to possess Cahors that I told my poor mother to make it one of the conditions *sine quâ non* of my marriage. Ha! here I am speaking Latin. Cahors, then, was the dowry of my wife; they promised it to me, they owe it to me."

"Sire, to owe and to pay" — began Chicot.

"You are right; to owe and to pay are two very different things, my friend; so that your opinion is that they will not pay me?"

"I am afraid not."

"The devil!" said Henry.

"And frankly" — continued Chicot.

"Well?"

"Frankly, they would be right, sire."

"They would be right — how so, my friend?"

"Because you did not know how to carry out your position as king, the husband of a daughter of France, because you did not know how to have your dowry paid first and your cities delivered afterwards."

"Wretch!" said Henry, smiling bitterly, "you no longer remember the tocsin of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, then? It seems to me that a man whom they want to kill the very night of his wedding does not think as much about his dowry as about his life."

"Good!" said Chicot; "but afterwards?"

"Afterwards?" demanded Henry.

"Yes; we have had peace, it seems to me. Well, we should have profited by this peace to act; we should have — excuse me, sire — we should, instead of making love, have negotiated. It is less amusing, I well know, but more profitable. I tell you this, truly, sire, as much for the King my master as for you. If Henry of France had in Henry of Navarre a strong ally, Henry of France would be stronger than every one else, and supposing that Catholics and Protestants could join together in one political interest, free to discuss their religious interests afterwards; Catholics and Protestants, that is, the two Henrys, would by themselves make the human race tremble."

"Oh! I," said Henry, with humility, "I do not aspire to make any one tremble, and provided that I do not tremble myself — But come, Chicot, let us speak no more of these things which trouble my mind; I have not Cahors, well! I will get along without it."

"That is hard, my king."

"What can you expect, since you yourself think that Henry will never give me this city?"

"I think so, sire; I am sure of it, and for three reasons."

"Tell them to me, Chicot."

"Willingly. The first is that Cahors is a city of great produce; that the King of France would rather keep it for himself than give it to any one."

"That is not exactly honest, Chicot."

"It is royal, sire."

"Ah! it is royal to take what one likes?"

"Yes, that is called taking the lion's share, and the lion is the king of beasts."

"I will remember what you tell me, my good Chicot, if ever I am king. Your second reason, my son?"

"This is it: Madame Catharine" —

"She still mingles in politics, my good mother Catharine?" interrupted Henry.

"Still; Madame Catharine would rather see her daughter in Paris than at Nérac; with her, rather than with you."

"You think so? Yet she does not love her daughter madly, this Madame Catharine."

"No, but Madame Marguerite serves you as a hostage, sire."

"You are saturated with ingenuity, Chicot. The devil take me if I should ever have thought of that; but indeed you may be right; yes, yes, a daughter of France, if need be, is a hostage. Well?"

"Well! sire, by lessening resources one lessens the pleasure of a sojourn. Nérac is a very pleasant city which has a charming park and paths such as exist nowhere else; but Madame Marguerite, deprived of resources, will tire of Nérac and will regret the Louvre."

"I prefer your first reason, Chicot," said Henry, shaking his head.

"Then I will tell you the third. Between the Duc d'Anjou, who is trying to make a throne for himself and who is stirring up Flanders, between the De Guises, who would fashion a crown for themselves, and who are stirring up France; between his majesty the King of Spain, who would try a universal monarchy, and who stirs up the world, you, prince of Navarre, are the balance, and maintain a certain equilibrium."

"Indeed! I, without weight?"

"Exactly. See the Swiss republic. Become powerful, that is heavy, and you will turn the scale. You will no longer be a counter-balance, you will be a weight."

"Oh! I like that reason very much, Chicot, and it is perfectly well deduced. You are a veritable scholar, Chicot."

"Faith, sire, I am what I am," said Chicot, flattered be it

what it might, by the compliment, and letting himself fall a prey to the royal good-nature to which he was not accustomed.

"Such, then, is the explanation of my position?" said Henry.

"Complete, sire."

"And I who saw nothing of all that, Chicot, I who was always hoping, you understand?"

"Well, sire, if I have advice to give you, it is to cease hoping, on the contrary!"

"Then, Chicot, I will do to this debt of the King of France that which I do to those of my farmers who cannot pay their rent; I put a 'p' by the side of their names."

"Which means, paid'?"

"Exactly."

"Put two 'p's', sire, and heave a sigh."

Henry sighed.

"I will do so, Chicot," said he. "For the rest, my friend, you see that one can live in Béarn, and that I have no actual need of Cahors."

"I see that, and, as I supposed, you are a wise prince, a philosophical king — But what is that noise?"

"Noise? where?"

"In the court, it seems to me."

"Look out of the window, my friend, look."

Chicot approached the window.

"Sire," said he, "there are a dozen shabbily dressed men below."

"Ah! those are my poor," said the King of Navarre, rising.

"Your majesty has his poor?"

"Without doubt. Does not God recommend charity? Although not a Catholic, Chicot, I am none the less a Christian."

"Bravo! sire."

"Come, Chicot, let us go down. We will give the alms together; then we will come up again for supper."

"Sire, I follow you."

"Take that purse which is on the small table, near my sword; do you see it?"

"I have it, sire."

"Good!"

Then they descended; night had fallen. The king seemed careworn and anxious.

Chicot looked at him and was sorry for this preoccupation.

"Where the devil did I get the idea," said he to himself, "of coming and talking politics to this good prince? I have made him sick at heart, truly, silly rascal that I am!"

Having once reached the court, Henry of Navarre approached the group of beggars who had been pointed out by Chicot.

There were in fact a dozen men of various heights, features, and costumes; men whom an ordinary observer would have taken, from their voice, their step, their gestures, for Bohemians, strangers, stray passers-by, but whom a clever observer would have recognized as distinguished gentlemen.

Henry took the purse from the hands of Chicot and made a sign.

All the beggars seemed to understand this sign perfectly. They approached and saluted him, each in turn with an air of humility which did not exclude a glance full of intelligence and audacity, bestowed on the king alone, as though to say to him:

"Under this covering our heart burns."

Henry replied by a nod of the head; then putting his thumb and first finger into the purse which Chicot held open, he took out a piece of money.

"Ah!" said Chicot, "you know that that is gold, sire?"

"Yes, my friend, I know it."

"The deuce! you are rich."

"Do you not see, my friend," said Henry, with a smile, "that every one of these gold pieces serves me as two? I am poor, on the contrary, Chicot, and I am forced to cut my pistoles in two in order to lead a sober life."

"That is true," said Chicot, with increasing surprise, "the pieces are halves."

"Oh! I am like my brother of France, who amuses himself by cutting out pictures; I have my pastimes. I amuse myself in my idle moments by cutting my ducats. A poor and honest Béarnais is as industrious as a Jew."

"It is all one to me, sire," said Chicot, shaking his head, for he suspected some new mystery hidden underneath it; "it is all one, but it is a singular way of giving alms."

"You would do otherwise?"

"Yes, in faith; instead of taking the trouble of cutting each piece I would give it uncut, saying: 'This is for two!'"

"They would quarrel, my dear fellow, and I should cause trouble in trying to do good."

"Indeed!" murmured Chicot, summing up in this word, which is the quintessence of all philosophies, his opposition to the strange ideas of the king.

Then Henry took a half piece of gold from his purse, and, standing in front of the first beggar with the calm, gentle manner which was part of his usual bearing, he looked at the man without speaking, but not without questioning him by a glance.

"Agen," said the latter, bowing.

"How many?" asked the king.

"Five hundred.

"Cahors."

And he handed him the coin, and took another from his purse.

The beggar bowed even lower than the first time and went away.

He was followed by another, who saluted with humility.

"Auch," said he, bowing.

"How many?"

"Three hundred and fifty."

"Cahors."

And he gave him the second piece, and took another from his purse.

This man disappeared like the first. A third approached, and bowed.

"Narbonne," said he.

"How many?"

"Eight hundred."

"Cahors."

And he gave him the third piece, and took another from his purse.

"Montauban," said a fourth.

"How many?"

"Six hundred."

"Cahors."

At length all approached and bowed, pronounced a name, received the strange alms, and gave a number, the total of which amounted to eight thousand.

To each of them Henry replied "Cahors," without once varying the tone of his voice in pronouncing the word. The distribution over, there were no more half pieces in the purse and no more beggars in the court.

"There," said Henry.

"That is all, sire?"

"Yes, I have finished."

Chicot pulled the king by the sleeve.

"Sire!" said he.

"Well?"

"Is it permitted me to be inquisitive?"

"Why not? Curiosity is a natural thing."

"What did those beggars say to you, and what the devil did you answer them?"

Henry smiled.

"In truth, everything is a mystery here."

"You find it so?"

"Yes, I have never seen alms given in that way."

"It is the custom at Nérac, my dear Chicot. You know the proverb: 'Every town has its custom.'"

"A singular custom, sire."

"No, the devil take me! nothing is simpler; all these men you see roam about the country to beg alms; but they are all from different towns."

"And then, sire?"

"Well! in order that I may not always give to the same, they tell me the name of their town; in this way, you see, my dear Chicot, I can distribute my benefits equally, and I am of use to all the poor wretches of every town in my kingdom."

"That is very well, sire, in regard to the name of the town which they pronounce; but why do you answer 'Cahors' to all?"

"Ah!" replied Henry, with an air of surprise perfectly feigned; "I answered 'Cahors' to them?"

"By Heaven!"

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Well, you see, since we spoke of Cahors, I had this word still in my mind. It is with that as with all things which we cannot have and which we greatly desire; we think of them and speak of them in thinking of them."

"Ah!" said Chicot, looking with mistrust in the direction in which the beggars had disappeared, "it is very much less clear than I would wish, sire; there is still, besides that"—

"What! There is still something else?"

"There is the number which each one pronounced, and

which, added together, makes a total of more than eight thousand."

"Oh! as to that number, Chicot, I am like you, I do not understand, unless the beggars are, as you know, divided into corporations, and that they stated the number of members in each of these corporations, which seems probable to me."

"Sire! sire!"

"Come to supper, my friend; nothing sharpens the intellect, in my opinion, as much as eating and drinking. We will try at table, and you shall see that if my ducats are cut in two, my bottles are full."

The king whistled for a page and ordered supper.

Then passing his arm familiarly through Chicot's he returned to his cabinet, where supper was served.

As he passed before the apartments of the queen, he glanced at the windows, but saw no light.

"Page," said he, "is not her majesty the queen in her rooms?"

"Her majesty," replied the page, "has gone to see Mademoiselle de Montmorency, who is said to be very ill."

"Ah! poor Fosseuse," said Henry, "it is true the queen has a kind heart. Come to supper, Chicot, come!"

CHAPTER LI.

THE REAL MISTRESS OF THE KING OF NAVARRE.

The supper was one of the liveliest. Henry seemed to have nothing further on his mind or in his heart, and when he was in this mood the Béarnais was an excellent host.

As to Chicot, he concealed as well as he could the germs of anxiety which had seized him at the coming of the Spanish ambassador, which had followed him to the court, which had increased at the distribution of gold to the beggars, and which had not left him since.

Henry had wanted his companion Chicot to sup with him alone; at the court of King Henry he had always felt a great weakness for Chicot, one of those weaknesses which men of wit have for men of wit; and Chicot, on his side, except for the embassy from Spain, the beggars with their passwords

and the cut pieces of gold, Chicot felt a great sympathy for the King of Navarre.

Seeing the king change the wine, and act in every respect like a good table companion, Chicot resolved to be somewhat careful, so as to let none of the flashes of wit escape which the freedom of the repast and the heat of the wines might inspire in the Béarnais.

Henry drank hard, and he had a way of leading his guests on, which allowed Chicot to remain behind scarcely more than one glass to his host's three.

But Monsieur Chicot's head was a head of iron, as we know. As to Henry of Navarre, all the wines were wines of the country, he said, and he drank them like whey.

All this was seasoned with many compliments, which the two guests exchanged with each other.

"How I envy you," said Chicot to the king, "and how pleasant your court, and how free from care your life, sire; what happy faces I see in this good household, and what wealth in this beautiful land of Gascony!"

"If my wife were here, my dear Chicot, I would not tell you what I am going to say; but in her absence I can confess to you that the best part of my life is that which you do not see."

"Ah! sire, they do indeed say some abusive things about your majesty."

Henry threw himself back in his chair, and caressed his beard with a laugh.

"Yes, yes, don't they?" said he; "they pretend that I reign much more over my fair subjects than over my men subjects."

"It is the truth, sire, and yet this surprises me."

"In what respect, my friend?"

"In that you have a great deal of the restless spirit which makes great kings, sire."

"Ah! Chicot, you are mistaken," said Henry; "I am more lazy than restless, and my whole life is proof of this. If I am in love, it is always with the one nearest to me; if it is wine that I choose, it is always the nearest bottle. Your health, Chicot!"

"Sire, you do me honor," replied Chicot, emptying his glass to the last drop; for the king was watching him with that shrewd look which seemed to penetrate to the depths of his thoughts.

"Therefore," continued the king, raising his eyes to Heaven, "what quarrels in my household, comrade!"

"Yes, I understand, all the queen's maids of honor adore you, sire!"

"They are my neighbors, Chicot."

"Well! well! sire, it results from this axiom that if you lived at Saint Denis, instead of Nérac, the King could not live as tranquilly as he does."

Henry became gloomy.

"The King! what are you saying, Chicot?" said Henry of Navarre; "the King! Do you imagine that I am a De Guise? I desire Cahors, it is true; but because Cahors is at my gate; my system again, Chicot. I have my ambition, but while sitting down; once risen, I am no longer desirous of anything."

"*Ventre de biche!* sire," replied Chicot, "this ambition for things within reach of your hand greatly resembles that of Cæsar Borgia, who took a kingdom town by town, saying that Italy was an artichoke which must be eaten leaf by leaf."

"This Cæsar Borgia was not such a bad politician, it seems to me, my friend," said Henry.

"No, but he was a very dangerous neighbor, and a very wicked brother."

"Ah! but would you compare me to a son of a pope, I, the chief of the Huguenots? One moment, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur."

"Sire, I compare you to no one."

"For what reason?"

"For the reason that I think he would be mistaken who would compare you to any other than yourself. You are ambitious, sire."

"What a queer idea!" said the Béarnais; "here is a man who, by every means, wants to force me to desire something."

"God forbid! sire; quite the contrary. I hope with all my heart that your majesty will want nothing."

"Wait, Chicot," said the king, "nothing calls you back to Paris, does it?"

"Nothing, sire."

"You will spend a few days with me, then?"

"If your majesty does me the honor to desire my company, I ask nothing better than to give you a week."

"A week! well! so be it, comrade; in a week you will know me like a brother. Let us drink, Chicot."

"Sire, I am no longer thirsty," said Chicot, who was beginning to give up the idea he had had at first of making the king drunk.

"Then I will leave you, comrade," said Henry; "a man should not remain at table when he no longer has anything to do there. Let us drink, I tell you."

"Why?"

"To sleep the better. This light wine of the country produces a very gentle sleep. Do you like hunting, Chicot?"

"Not very much, sire; do you?"

"I have been passionately devoted to it ever since my stay at the court of King Charles IX."

"Why did your majesty do me the honor of asking if I liked hunting?" demanded Chicot.

"Because I am going to hunt to-morrow, and I counted on taking you with me."

"Sire, that would be too much honor, but" —

"Oh, comrade, be easy, this chase is done to make glad the eyes and the heart of every swordsman. I am a good hunter, Chicot, and I want you to see me to my best advantage, the devil! you want to know me, you say?"

"*Ventre de biche!* sire, it is one of my greatest desires, I confess."

"Well! it is a side on which you have not yet studied me."

"Sire, I will do everything which will please the king."

"Good! then the affair is settled! Ah! here is a page; we are interrupted."

"Some business of importance, sire."

"Business! for me, when I am at table! It is astonishing, but this dear Chicot still believes himself at the court of France. Chicot, my friend, know one thing; that at Nérac" —

"Well! sire?"

"When one has supped well, one goes to bed."

"But this page?"

"Well! but may not this page announce something besides business?"

"Ah! I understand, sire, and I will go to bed."

Chicot arose; the king did the same, and took his guest's arm.

This haste to send him away seemed suspicious to Chicot, to whom everything, for that matter, since the announcement of the Spanish ambassador, had begun to look suspicious. He resolved, therefore, not to leave the cabinet until as late as possible.

"Oh! oh!" said he, staggering; "that is strange, sire."

The Béarnais smiled.

"What is strange, my friend?"

"*Ventre de biche!* my head is whirling round. As long as I was seated, it went well; but now that I have risen, whew!"

"Bah!" said Henry; "we did nothing but taste the wine."

"Good! tasted, sire; you call that tasting? Bravo! Ah! you are a fierce drinker, and I render you homage, as to my sovereign lord! Good! You call that tasting, do you?"

"Chicot, my friend," said the Béarnais, trying to discover, by one of those subtle glances which belonged to him, if Chicot was really drunk or only pretending to be; "Chicot, my friend, I think the thing which you would best do now is to go to bed."

"Yes, sire; good-night, sire."

"Good night, Chicot, until to-morrow."

"Yes, sire, until to-morrow! And your majesty is right; that which Chicot would better do is to go to bed. Good-night, sire!"

And Chicot lay down on the floor.

On seeing this resolution of his guest, Henry glanced at the door.

Rapid as was this glance, Chicot caught it on the wing. Henry approached Chicot.

"You are so drunk, my poor Chicot, that you do not notice one thing."

"What?"

"You are taking the matting of my cabinet for your bed."

"Chicot is a warrior; Chicot does not notice such a little thing."

"Then you do not perceive two things?"

"Ah! ah! and what is the second?"

"That I am expecting some one."

"For supper? well! let us sup."

And Chicot made a fruitless effort to rise.

"*Ventre Saint Gris!*" cried Henry, "how suddenly you

become drunk, my friend! Get up, by Heaven! you see well enough that she is growing impatient."

"She!" said Chicot; "what she?"

"Well! by Heaven! the woman I am expecting, and who is waiting at the door, there"—

"A woman! Well! why did you not say so, Henriquet? Ah! pardon," said Chicot, "I thought—I thought I was speaking to the King of France. He has spoiled me, you see, this good Henriquet. Why did you not say so, sire? I will go away."

"Good! you are a true gentleman, Chicot. There, there, get up and go away, for I have a fine night to spend, do you hear? a whole night."

Chicot rose and stumbled to the door.

"Adieu, dear friend, adieu; sleep well."

"And you, sire"—

"Hush!"

"Yes, yes, hush!"

And he opened the door.

"You will find the page in the corridor, and he will show you your room. Go, now."

"Thanks, sire."

And Chicot went out, having bowed as low as a drunken man could.

But as soon as the door closed behind him every trace of drinking disappeared; he took three steps forward, and returning suddenly, he put his eye to the wide keyhole.

Henry was already engaged in opening the door to the unknown lady whom Chicot, curious like all ambassadors, wanted to know, no matter by what means. Instead of a woman it was a man who entered.

And when this man had removed his hat, Chicot recognized the noble and serious face of Duplessis Mornay, the stern and watchful adviser of Henry of Navarre.

"Ah! the devil!" said Chicot; "there is one who will surprise our lover and trouble him, surely, more than I myself did."

But Henry's face, at sight of the man, expressed nothing but joy; he grasped the hands of the newcomer, pushed back the table with scorn, and made Mornay sit down near him with all the ardor that a lover would use in approaching his mistress.

He seemed eager to hear the first words which the adviser

was to utter; but suddenly, and before Mornay had spoken, he arose, and making a sign to him to wait, he went to the door and drew the bolts with a circumspection which gave Chicot much to think about.

Then he fixed his eager eyes on some charts, plans, and letters which the minister placed successively under his eyes.

The king lighted other candles, and began to write and to mark the geographical charts.

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot, "this is the fine night of the King of Navarre. *Ventre de biche!* if they all resemble this one Henry of Valois may well pass some bad ones."

At that moment he heard a step behind him; it was the page who guarded the corridor, and who was waiting there by order of the king.

In the fear of being suprised if he remained listening longer, Chicot resumed his full height and asked his room of the boy. Besides, he had nothing further to fear; the arrival of Duplessis had told him everything.

"Come with me, if you please, monsieur," said D'Aubiac, "I am ordered to conduct you to your apartment."

And he led Chicot to the second floor, where his room had been prepared.

For Chicot there was no further doubt; he knew half of the letters which composed the enigma called the King of Navarre. So, instead of going to sleep, he seated himself sad and pensive on his bed, while the moon, descending on the sharp angles of the roof, threw, as from the top of a silver ewer, its azure light over river and meadow.

"Well, well," said Chicot, sadly, "Henry is a true king: Henry conspires. All this palace, his park, the town which surrounds it, the province which surrounds the town, all is a hot-bed of conspiracy; all the women make love, but political love; all the men create a hope for the future. Henry is crafty; his intelligence borders on genius; he has an understanding with Spain, the country of deceit. Who knows if his noble reply to the ambassador is not the opposite of what he thinks, and even if he did not warn this ambassador by a wink of the eye, or some other tacit agreement, which I, hidden as I was, could not know. Henry talks with spies; he pays or has them paid by some agent; these beggars were neither more nor less than gentlemen disguised. Their gold pieces so artistically cut in two are pledges of recognition, passwords,

material or palpable. Henry pretends to be madly in love, and while he is supposed to be engaged in making love, he is spending his nights working with Mornay, who never sleeps, and who knows not love. That is what I had to see and I have seen it. Queen Marguerite has lovers, the king is aware of this; he knows them and tolerates them, because he still has need of them and of her, perhaps of all at once. Not being a warrior, he must clearly have captains, and not having a great deal of money, he is forced to let them choose the money which best suits them. Henry of Valois told me he did not sleep. *Ventre de biche!* he does well not to sleep. Besides, fortunately, this perfidious Henry is a good gentleman, to whom the Lord, in giving a genius for intrigue, forgot to give the strength of the initiative. Henry, they say, is afraid of the sound of muskets, and when, still a boy, he was led to battle, they agree in telling that he could not remain in the saddle longer than a quarter of an hour. Fortunately," repeated Chicot; "for in the times in which we live, if, with intrigue, such a man were a soldier, this man would be the king of the world. There is indeed a De Guise; the latter possesses both kinds of strength: he has the arm and the intrigue, but he has the disadvantage of being known to be brave and clever, while no one distrusts the Béarnais. I alone have guessed him."

And Chicot rubbed his hands.

"Well!" he continued; "having guessed him, I have nothing more to do here; therefore, while he works or sleeps, I will calmly and quietly leave the town. There are not many ambassadors, I believe, who can boast of having accomplished their entire mission in one day, but I have done it. Therefore I will leave Nérac; and once out of Nérac, I will gallop to France."

He spoke thus, and began putting on his spurs, which he had taken off when he presented himself before the king.

CHAPTER LII.

CONCERNING THE ASTONISHMENT WHICH CHICOT FELT AT BEING SO POPULAR IN THE TOWN OF NÉRAC.

Chicot, having resolved to leave the court of the King of Navarre incognito, began to make up his little parcel for travelling.

He simplified it as much as possible, his idea being that one goes faster the less one weighs.

Assuredly, his sword was the heaviest part of the baggage he carried.

"Let us see," said Chicot to himself, as he tied his bundle, "how much time I need to take to the King news of what I have seen, and consequently of what I fear? Two days to reach a town from which a good governor will despatch couriers at full speed. Let this town, for instance, be Cahors, Cahors of which the King of Navarre speaks so much, and which so deservedly occupies his thoughts. Once there I can rest, for, after all, the strength of man has but a certain limit; I will rest, therefore, at Cahors, and the horses shall run for me. So, Chicot, my friend, limbs, swiftness, and nerve. You thought you had accomplished your entire mission, simpleton, you have done but the half of it, and now set out once more!"

This said, Chicot extinguished the light, opened the door as softly as he could, and started out on tiptoe.

Chicot was a clever strategist. While following D'Aubiac he had thrown a glance to the right, a glance to the left, a glance before and behind and had recognized all the localities. An antechamber, a corridor, a staircase; then, at the foot of this staircase, the court. But Chicot had no sooner taken four steps in the antechamber than he ran against something which at once rose.

This something was a page lying on the rug outside of the room, and who, awakened, exclaimed:

"Well, good evening, Monsieur Chicot, good evening!"

Chicot recognized D'Aubiac.

"Well, good evening, Monsieur d'Aubiac," said he; "but step a little aside, if you please. I want to take a walk."

"Ah! but it is forbidden to walk in the château at night. Monsieur Chicot."

"Why so, if you please, Monsieur d'Aubiac?"

"Because the king fears robbers, and the queen gallants."

"The devil!"

"But it is only robbers and gallants who walk about at night instead of sleeping."

"Yet, dear Monsieur d'Aubiac," said Chicot, with his most winning smile, "I am neither the one nor the other. I am an ambassador, and a very weary ambassador from having talked Latin with the queen and supped with the king; for the queen is a great Latin scholar and the king a hard drinker; let me go out, therefore, my friend, for I have a great desire to walk."

"In the town, Monsieur Chicot?"

"Oh, no! in the gardens."

"The deuce! in the gardens? Monsieur Chicot, it is forbidden to walk there more than in the town."

"My little friend," said Chicot, "it is giving you a compliment to say you are very vigilant, indeed, for your age. You have nothing to occupy you?"

"No."

"You are neither gambler nor lover?"

"To gamble, one must have money, Monsieur Chicot; to be in love, one must have a mistress."

"Assuredly," said Chicot.

And he felt in his pocket.

The page watched what he was doing.

"Search your memory well, my dear friend," said he to him, "and I will wager that you will find in it some charming woman for whom I beg you to buy many ribbons and to give many violinists with this."

And Chicot slipped into the hand of the page ten pistoles which were not cut like those of the Béarnais.

"Come, then, Monsieur Chicot," said the page, "it is easy to see that you come from the court of France, you have manners to which one would not know how to refuse anything; leave your room, then, but be careful to make no noise."

Chicot did not wait to be told twice; he glided like a shadow into the corridor, and from the corridor to the stairway, but having reached the foot of the peristyle, he found an officer of the palace, sleeping on a chair.

This man barred the door by the very weight of his body; to try to pass would have been folly.

"Ah! little brigand of a page," murmured Chicot; "you knew that, and you did not warn me."

To add to his ill luck, the officer seemed to be sleeping very lightly; he moved with nervous starts, now an arm, now a limb; once, even, he raised his arm like a man ready to awaken.

Chicot looked about him to see if there were not some exit by which, thanks to his long legs and a solid fist, he could escape without going through the door. Finally he perceived what he wanted.

It was one of those so-called arched imposts, which had been left open, either to admit the air or because the King of Navarre, a not very careful proprietor, had not thought it necessary to renew the glass.

Chicot touched the wall with his fingers; he calculated, by feeling, each space included between the ledges, and used it to put his foot on, like the rounds of a ladder. At length he raised himself up — our readers know his agility and swiftness — without making more noise than a dry leaf would have made grazing the wall under the breath of an autumn wind.

But the impost was of unequal convexity, so much so that the curve was not the same as that of Chicot's abdomen and shoulders, although he had not much abdomen, and his shoulders, supple as those of a cat, seemed to dislocate and disappear into the flesh, in order to occupy less space.

The result was that when Chicot had passed his head and one shoulder over, and had taken his foot from the ledge of the wall, he found himself suspended between heaven and earth without being able to retreat or advance.

He then began a series of efforts, the first result of which was to tear his doublet and scratch his skin.

That which rendered his position more difficult was his sword, the handle of which would not move, thus making a hook on the inner side which held Chicot tight to the frame of the window.

Chicot collected all his strength, all his patience, and all his energy in order to unfasten the hook of his belt, but it was from this very hook that he hung; he had therefore to change the manœuvre: he succeeded in slipping his arm behind his back and drawing his sword from its sheath; once the sword drawn out, it was easier to find, thanks to his angular body, an interstice through which he pushed the handle; the sword

therefore fell first to the pavement, and Chicot, gliding through the opening like a snake, followed it, breaking his fall with his two hands. This whole struggle of the man against the iron jaws of the impost had not been accomplished without noise; so Chicot, upon rising, found himself face to face with a soldier.

"Ah! my God! Have you hurt yourself, Monsieur Chicot?" demanded the latter, presenting the end of his halberd as a means of support.

"Again!" thought Chicot.

Then thinking of the interest which this brave man had shown for him:

"No, my friend," said he, "not at all."

"That is very fortunate," said the soldier. "I defy any one, whoever he may be, to accomplish such a feat without breaking his head; in truth, only you could have done it, Monsieur Chicot."

"But how the devil do you know my name?" asked Chicot, still endeavoring to pass.

"I know it because I saw you in the palace to-day, and because I asked: 'Who is that tall gentleman talking with the king?'

"'That is Monsieur Chicot,' they answered me. That is how I know it."

"They could not be more gallant," said Chicot; "but as I am in great haste, my friend, you will permit me" —

"What, Monsieur Chicot?"

"To leave you and go about my business."

"But we do not leave the palace at night; I have orders."

"You see very well that we do leave, since I have come out."

"That is a reason, I well know, but" —

"But?"

"You will go back, that is all, Monsieur Chicot."

"Ah! no."

"What! no?"

"Not that way, at least; the road is too rough."

"If I were an officer instead of a soldier I should ask you why you came out that way; but that is no concern of mine; what does concern me is that you must go back again. Return, therefore, Monsieur Chicot, I beg you."

And the soldier put into his words such an accent of persuasion that Chicot was touched. Consequently Chicot felt in his pocket, and drew out ten pistoles.

"You are too saving, my friend," said he, "not to understand that since I have reduced my clothes to their present state by taking this road, they would be much worse if I were to go back by it; I should then succeed in tearing them completely and I should have to go naked, which would be rather indecent in a court where there are so many young and pretty women, beginning with the queen; let me pass, therefore, my friend, to go to the tailor's."

And he put the ten pistoles into the man's hand.

"Pass quickly, then, Monsieur Chicot, pass quickly."

And the man pocketed the silver.

Chicot was in the street; he looked about to get his bearings. He had crossed the town to reach the palace; it was the opposite way he had to take now, since he must leave by the gate opposite the one by which he had entered. That was all. The night, clear and without clouds, was not favorable for a flight. Chicot regretted those good foggy nights of France, which, at that hour, would have made the streets of Paris so that one could pass within four feet of another without being seen; besides, on the pointed pavements of the town, his iron boots sounded like a horse's hoofs.

The unlucky ambassador had no more than turned the corner of the street before he met a patrolman.

He stopped of his own accord, knowing that he would appear suspicious by trying to hide or force his way.

"Well! good evening, Monsieur Chicot," said the chief of the patrol, saluting him with his sword, "do you want us to take you back to the palace? You look to me as though you were lost and were trying to find your way."

"Ah! so every one knows me here?" murmured Chicot. "By Heaven! that is strange."

Then aloud, and in the most careless manner he could assume:

"No, cornet," said he, "you are mistaken, I am not going to the palace."

"You are wrong, Monsieur Chicot," replied the officer, gravely.

"And why so, monsieur?"

"Because a very severe edict forbids the inhabitants of Nérac to go out at night, except from urgent necessity, without permission and without a lantern."

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Chicot, "but the edict cannot apply to me."

"And why not?"

"I am not an inhabitant of Nérac."

"Yes; but you are at Nérac. 'Inhabitant' does not mean living in; 'inhabitant' means staying in; and you will not deny that you are staying in Nérac, since I meet you in the streets of Nerac."

"You are logical, monsieur; unfortunately, I am in haste. Act a little in violation of your orders, then, and let me pass, I beg you."

"You will lose yourself, Monsieur Chicot; Nérac is a tortuous city; you will fall into some dirty hole; you need to be guided; allow three of my men to conduct you back to the palace."

"But I am not going to the palace, I tell you."

"Where are you going, then?"

"I cannot sleep at night, and so I walk. Nérac is a charming town, full of the unexpected, it seems to me; I want to see it, study it."

"They shall take you wherever you desire, Monsieur Chicot. Ho, there! three men!"

"I beseech you, monsieur, do not take away the picturesqueness of my walk. I like to go alone."

"You will be assassinated by robbers."

"I have my sword."

"Ah! that is true; I had not seen it. In that case you will be arrested by the provost for being armed."

Chicot saw that there were no means of getting out of it by subtleties; he took the officer aside.

"Come, monseiur," said he, "you are young and pleasing, you know that love is an imperious tyrant."

"No doubt, Monsieur Chicot, no doubt."

"Well, love is burning me up, cornet. I have a certain lady to visit."

"Where?"

"In a certain quarter."

"Young?"

"Twenty-three."

"Beautiful?"

"As the Loves themselves."

"I congratulate you, Monsieur Chicot."

"Good! you will let me pass, then?"

"Well! it is urgent, apparently."

"Urgent is the word, monsieur."

"Pass on, then."

"But alone, you mean? You know that I cannot compromise" —

"The idea! Pass on, Monsieur Chicot, pass on."

"You are a gallant man, cornet."

"Monsieur!"

"No, *ventre de biche!* it is a good trait. But come, how do you know me?"

"I saw you at the palace with the king."

"That is what small towns are!" thought Chicot; "if I were recognized like this in Paris, how many times should I have had holes in my skin instead of in my doublet!"

And he shook the hand of the young officer, who said to him:

"By the way, in what direction are you going?"

"Towards the Porte Agen."

"Be careful not to lose your way."

"Am I not on the road?"

"Yes, go straight ahead, and don't get into trouble; this is what I wish you."

"Thanks."

And Chicot set off, more quickly and more joyously than ever. He had not gone a hundred feet before he found himself face to face with the night watchman.

"By Heaven, what a well guarded town!" thought Chicot.

"No one can pass!" cried the provost in a voice of thunder.

"But, monsieur," objected Chicot, "I wish, however" —

"Ah, Monsieur Chicot! it is you; how do you happen to be walking in the streets such a cold night?" asked the magisterial officer.

"Ah! evidently it is a wager," thought Chicot, greatly troubled. And bowing, he made a movement to continue his way.

"Monsieur Chicot, take care," said the provost.

"Take care of what, Monsieur Magistrate?"

"You mistake the road; you are going towards the gates."

"Exactly."

"In that case I shall arrest you, Monsieur Chicot."

"No, Monsier Provost; plague it! you would perform a fine act!"

"But" —

"Approach, Monsieur Provost, so that your soldiers will not hear what we say."

The provost drew near.

"I am listening," said he.

"The king has given me a commission for the lieutenant of the Porte Agen."

"Ah! ah!" said the provost, with an air of surprise.

"That surprises you?"

"Yes."

"It ought not to astonish you, however, since you know me."

"I know you from having seen you at the palace with the king."

Chicot stamped his foot; impatience was beginning to take possession of him.

"That ought to suffice to prove to you that I have the confidence of his majesty."

"No doubt, no doubt; go on, and execute the king's commission, Monsieur Chicot, I will not arrest you."

"This is queer, but pleasant," thought Chicot; "I am stopped on the way, yet I still keep going. *Ventre de biche!* there is a gate — it must be that of Agen; in five minutes I shall be outside."

In short, he arrived at the gate, which was guarded by a sentinel who was walking back and forth, his musket on his shoulder.

"Pardon, my friend," said Chicot, "will you give orders for the gate to be opened for me?"

"I do not give orders, Monsieur Chicot," replied the sentinel, pleasantly, "since I am only a soldier."

"You know me, also!" cried Chicot, exasperated.

"I have that honor, Monsieur Chicot; I was this morning on guard at the palace; I saw you talking with the king."

"Well, my friend, since you know me, learn one thing."

"What?"

"That the king has given me a very important message for Agen; so just open the postern for me."

"I would do so with great pleasure, Monsieur Chicot, but I have no keys."

"Who has them?"

"The officer on duty."

Chicot sighed.

"And where is the officer on duty?" he asked.

"Oh! you need not trouble yourself on that account."

The man rang a bell, which awakened the sleeping officer.

"What is the matter?" asked the latter, putting his head out of his window.

"Lieutenant, here is a gentleman who wants the gate opened in order to pass through into the open country."

"Ah! Monsieur Chicot," cried the officer, "pardon, so sorry to keep you waiting; excuse me, I am at your service; I will come down."

Chicot bit his nails with growing anger.

"Shall I not find any one who does not know me? This Nérac is a lantern, then, and I am the light!"

The officer appeared at the door.

"Excuse me, Monsieur Chicot," said he, advancing in great haste, "I was asleep."

"Indeed, monsieur," said Chicot, "the night is made for that; would you be good enough to have the gate opened for me? I, myself, do not sleep, unfortunately. The king — you too, no doubt, are aware that the king knows me."

"I saw you to-day talking with his majesty at the palace."

"Just so," growled Chicot. "Well, so be it. If you saw me talking with the king, at least you did not hear me talking."

"No, Monsieur Chicot, I say just as it was."

"I too; now, the king in speaking with me, commanded me to go to-night to carry out a commission at Agen, and this gate is that of Agen, is it not?"

"Yes, Monsieur Chicot."

"It is closed?"

"As you see."

"Kindly have it opened for me, I beg you."

"Yes, indeed, Monsieur Chicot. Anthenas! Anthenas! unlock the gate for Monsieur Chicot, quick, quick, quick!"

Chicot opened wide his eyes and breathed like a diver who rises from the water after five minutes' immersion.

The gate creaked on its hinges, the gate of Paradise for poor Chicot, who saw beyond it all the delights of liberty.

He saluted the officer cordially, and walked towards the arch.

"Adieu," said he, "thanks!"

"Adieu, Monsieur Chicot, a pleasant journey!"

And Chicot took another step toward the gate.

"By the way, stupid that I am!" cried the officer, running after Chicot, and catching hold of him by the sleeve; "I forgot, dear Monsieur Chicot, to ask you for your pass."

"What! my pass?"

"Certainly; you are a warrior, Monsieur Chicot, and you know what a pass is, do you not? One does not leave a town like Nérac, you understand, without a pass from the king, especially when the king lives in it."

"And by whom should this pass be signed?"

"By the king himself. So, since it is the king who is sending you into the open country, he will not have forgotten to give you a pass."

"Ah! ah! do you doubt, then, that it is the king who is sending me?" said Chicot, his eyes on fire, for he saw himself on the point of being disappointed, and anger suggested to him the evil thought of killing the officer, the gatekeeper, and rushing through the open gate, at the risk of being pursued in his flight by a hundred musket-shots.

"I doubt nothing, Monsieur Chicot, especially the facts which you do me the honor to tell me, but reflect that if the king gave you this commission" —

"In person, monsieur, in person."

"All the more reason. His majesty knows, then, that you are going to leave" —

"*Ventre de biche!*" cried Chicot; "I should think he did know it."

"In that case I shall have a pass to deliver to-morrow morning to monsieur the governor of the place."

"And the governor of the place," demanded Chicot, "is" —

"Monsieur de Mornay, who does not joke with orders, Monsieur Chicot, — you ought to know that, — and who would have me shot, purely and simply, if I failed in mine."

Chicot was beginning to caress the handle of his sword with an evil smile, when turning round he perceived that the gate was barred by an outside patrol which would have prevented him from passing, even had he killed the lieutenant, the sentinel, and the gate-keeper.

"Well," said Chicot to himself, with a sigh, "it was well played. I am a fool, I have lost."

And he turned on his heels.

"Do you want us to conduct you back, Monsieur Chicot?" asked the officer.

"It is not worth while, thanks," replied Chicot.

Chicot retraced his steps, but he was not at the end of his martyrdom.

He met the provost, who said to him:

"So, Monsieur Chicot, you have already executed your commission? The deuce! you are quick at this business of yours!"

Farther on the patrol came upon him at the corner of the street, and cried out:

"Good evening, Monsieur Chicot. Well! that lady, you know — Are you pleased with Nérac, Monsieur Chicot?"

Finally the soldier of the peristyle, still on guard in the same place, fired his last broadside.

"By Heaven! Monsieur Chicot," said he to him, "the tailor has mended you rather poorly, and God forgive me, you are more torn even than when you started."

Chicot did not wish to risk being skinned like a hare by passing again by the impost; so he lay down in front of the door, and pretended to be asleep. By chance, or rather by charity, the door opened, and Chicot entered, abashed and humbled, into the palace.

His wild look touched the page, still at his post.

"Dear Monsieur Chicot," said the latter to him, "do you want me to give you the key to all this?"

"Give, serpent, give," murmured Chicot.

"Well! the king loves you so much that he intends to keep you."

"And you knew it, little brigand, and you did not warn me!"

"Oh, Monsieur Chicot, impossible, it was a state secret."

"But I paid you, rascal!"

"Oh! the secret was worth more than ten pistoles, you will admit, dear Monsieur Chicot."

Chicot entered his room again, and fell asleep in a rage.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE FIRST HUNTSMAN OF THE KING OF NAVARRE.

On leaving the king, Marguerite went at once to the apartment of the maids of honor.

On the way she took with her her physician, Chirac, who slept at the château, and with him entered the room of poor Fosseuse, who, pale, and surrounded by inquisitive looks, was complaining of pains in her stomach, without being able, so acute was her suffering, to answer any question or accept any consolation. At this time Fosseuse was twenty or twenty-one years old. She was a tall, beautiful girl, with blue eyes, blond hair, and a supple figure full of indolence and grace; but for three months she had not gone out, and had complained of a lassitude which prevented her from rising; she had reclined on a folding-chair and from the folding-chair had finally passed to her bed. Chirac began by dismissing the assistants, and taking possession of the invalid's bedside, he remained alone with her and the queen.

Fosseuse, frightened by these preliminaries, to which the two countenances of Chirac and the queen, the one impassible and the other frozen, could not but give a certain solemnity, raised herself on her pillow, and stammered her thanks for the honor which the queen her mistress had done her.

Marguerite was paler than Fosseuse; wounded pride is more painful than cruelty or illness.

Chirac felt the pulse of the young girl, but it was almost in spite of herself.

"What do you feel?" he asked her after a moment's examination.

"Pains in my stomach, monsieur," replied the poor child; "but it will amount to nothing, I assure you, and if only I had quiet" —

"What quiet, mademoiselle?" asked the queen, and Fosseuse burst into tears.

"Do not grieve, mademoiselle," continued Marguerite, "his majesty begged me to visit you to soothe your mind."

"Oh! what kindness, madame!"

Chirac dropped the hand of Fosseuse.

"I know now what your trouble is," said he.

"You know?" murmured Fosseuse, shivering.

"Yes, we know that you must be suffering a very great deal," added Marguerite.

Fosseuse continued to grow frightened at being thus at the mercy of two overmastering forces, science and jealousy.

Marguerite made a sign to Chirac, who left the room. Then Fosseuse's fear turned into trembling; she almost fainted.

"Mademoiselle," said Marguerite, "although for some time you have acted towards me as towards a stranger, and although I am informed every day of the ill turns which you do me with my husband" —

"I, madame?"

"Do not interrupt me, I beg you. Although, in short, you have aspired to a position much above your ambition, the friendship that I bear you, and that I have given to all my maids of honor, urges me to help you in the trouble in which we find you at present."

"Madame, I swear to you" —

"Do not deny; I already have too many griefs. Do not ruin first your honor and then mine — I, who have almost as much interest as you in your honor, since you belong to me. Mademoiselle, tell me everything, and in this I will be to you as a mother."

"Oh! Madame! Madame! do you believe what they say, then?"

"Take care not to interrupt me, mademoiselle, for it seems to me that time presses. I want to tell you that at this moment Monsieur Chirac, who knows your malady, — you remember the words which he spoke just now, — that at present Monsieur Chirac is in the antechamber, where he is announcing to every one that the contagious disease of which they are talking in the country is in the palace, and that you are threatened with being attacked by it. However, if there is still time I will take you to Mas d'Agenois, which is a remote house of the king, my husband; there we shall be alone, or almost alone. The king, on his part, is about to set out with his followers on a hunt, which he says will keep him away several days. We will not leave Mas d'Agenois until after your confinement."

"Madame! Madame!" cried Fosseuse, crimson with shame and grief, "if you credit everything that is said about me, let me die in misery."

"You respond but poorly to my generosity, mademoiselle, and you also count too much on the friendship of the king, who has begged me not to abandon you."

"The king? The king said" —

"Do you doubt it, when I tell you, mademoiselle? If I did not see the symptoms of your real malady, if I did not guess from your suffering that the crisis is approaching, I might perhaps believe in your denial."

Just then, as though to decide in favor of the queen, poor Fosseuse, overwhelmed by the pains of intense suffering, fell back on her bed, livid and panting.

Marguerite watched her a few minutes without anger, but also without pity.

"Must I still believe in your denials, mademoiselle?" said she at last to the poor girl, when the latter was able to rise, showing, as she did so, a face so agitated and so bathed in tears that it would have softened Catharine herself.

At that moment, and as if God had tried to send help to the wretched girl, the door opened and the King of Navarre entered hurriedly.

Henry, who had not the same reasons for sleeping as Chicot, had not slept. After having worked an hour with Mornay, and having, during that hour, made all his plans regarding the hunt which he had so pompously announced to Chicot, he had hurried to the summer-house of the maids of honor.

"Well! what do they say?" said he, entering, "that my Fosseuse is still suffering?"

"Do you see, madame," cried the young girl at sight of her lover, and made stronger by the aid which had come to her, "do you see that the king has said nothing, and that I do right to deny?"

"Monsieur," interrupted the queen, turning to Henry, "have this humiliating struggle cease, I beg of you; I believe I understood that your majesty had honored me with your confidence, and had revealed mademoiselle's condition. Tell her, therefore, that I know everything, so that she may not allow herself to doubt when I affirm."

"My child," said Henry, with a tenderness which he did not even attempt to conceal, "you persist in denying, then?"

"The secret does not belong to me, sire," replied the courageous girl, "and so long as I have not received permission from your lips to tell everything" —

"My child Fosseuse has a brave heart, madame," replied Henry; "pardon her, I implore you; and you, my child, have every confidence in the kindness of your queen. The gratitude is my concern, and I will take charge of it."

And Henry took Marguerite's hand and pressed it with warmth. At that moment a sharp spasm of pain again seized the young girl; she gave way a second time beneath the tempest, and, bent like a lily, she bowed her head with a dull and painful groan.

Henry was touched to the depths of his heart when he saw the pale brow, the swimming eyes, the damp, dishevelled hair; when, in short, he saw on the temples and lips of Fosseuse that sweat of anguish which seemed bordering on agony.

Thoroughly distracted, he rushed towards her with open arms.

"Fosseuse, dear Fosseuse!" he murmured, falling on his knees before the bed.

Marguerite, gloomy and silent, pressed her burning forehead against the window-panes.

Fosseuse had the strength to raise her arms and put them around her lover's neck; then she laid her lips on his, thinking that she was about to die, and that in this last, this supreme kiss, she was sending forth to Henry her soul and her farewell. Then she fell back unconscious. Henry, as pale as she, inert and voiceless like herself, let his head fall forward on the sheet of her bed of agony, which seemed so nearly becoming a shroud.

Marguerite approached the group, in which were mingled physical pain and moral suffering.

"Rise, monsieur, and let me finish the task which you have imposed on me," said she, with majestic strength. And as Henry seemed anxious at this manifestation and half rose to his knee:

"Oh, fear nothing, monsieur," said she; "since my pride alone is wounded, I am strong. Against my heart I would not have answered for myself; but fortunately my heart has nothing to do in all this."

Henry raised his head.

"Madame?" said he.

"Do not add a word, monsieur," said Marguerite, extending her hand, "or I shall believe that your indulgence has been calculated. We are brother and sister; we understand each other."

Henry led her to Fosseuse, whose icy hand he placed in Marguerite's feverish one.

"Go, sire, go," said the queen, "start on your chase. Just now the more attendants you take with you, the more inquisitive people you will remove from the bedside of — mademoiselle."

"But," said Henry, "I saw no one in the antechambers."

"No, sire," replied Marguerite, smiling, "they think that the plague is here; hasten, therefore, to leave, and take your pleasure elsewhere."

"Madame," said Henry, "I will go, and will hunt for both of us."

And he threw a last tender glance at Fosseuse, still unconscious, and rushed from the room.

Once in the antechamber he shook his head as though to throw the remains of anxiety from his brow; then, his face beaming with that sly smile which was peculiar to him, he ascended to the apartment of Chicot, who, we have said, was sleeping with clinched fists.

The king opened the door, and shook the sleeper in his bed.

"Well! well! pal," said he. "Quick! quick! it is two o'clock in the morning."

"Ah! the devil!" said Chicot; "you call me 'pal,' sire. Did you mistake me for the Duc de Guise?"

In fact, Henry, when he spoke of the Duc de Guise, was in the habit of calling him "pal."

"I take you for my friend," said he.

"And you make me a prisoner; me, an ambassador! Sire, you violate the rights of man."

Henry began to laugh. Chicot, before all else a man of wit, could not help keeping him company.

"You are mad. Why the devil did you wish to go away from here? Are you not well treated?"

"Too well, *ventre de biche!* too well. I seem to be like a goose which is being fattened in a poultry-yard. Every one says to me: 'Little, little Chicot, how cunning he is!' but they clip my wings, and shut the door on me."

"Chicot, my child," said Henry, shaking his head, "reassure yourself; you are not fat enough for my table."

"Well! sire," said Chicot, rising, "I find you very lively this morning; what news, then?"

"Ah! I am going to tell you. I am leaving for the chase,

you see, and I am always very gay when I go hunting. Come, out of bed, comrade, out of bed!"

"What! you take me with you, sire?"

"You shall be my official historian, Chicot."

"I am to keep account of the shots fired?"

"Exactly."

Chicot shook his head.

"Well! what is the matter?" asked the king.

"This," replied Chicot; "that I have never seen such gayety without anxiety."

"Bah!"

"Yes, it is like the sun when it"—

"Well?"

"Well, sire, rain, lightning, and thunder are not far away."

Henry stroked his beard with a smile and replied:

"If a storm comes, Chicot, my cloak is wide, and you will be under cover."

Then advancing towards the antechamber, while Chicot dressed himself, murmuring the meantime:

"My horse!" cried the king; "and let Monsieur de Mornay be informed that I am ready."

"Ah! it is Monsieur de Mornay who is the first huntsman of the chase?" asked Chicot.

"Monsieur de Mornay is everything here, Chicot," replied Henry. "The King of Navarre is so poor that he has not the means to divide his charges into specialties. I have only one man."

"Yes, but he is good," sighed Chicot.

CHAPTER LIV.

HOW THEY HUNTED THE WOLF IN NAVARRE.

Chicot, casting his eyes over the preparations for departure, could not help remarking in a low tone that the hunts of the King of Navarre were less sumptuous affairs than those of King Henry of France.

Twelve or fifteen gentlemen only, among whom he recognized Monsieur le Vicomte of Turenne, the object of the matrimonial contests, formed the entire suite of his majesty.

Furthermore, as these gentlemen were rich only on the surface, as they had not large enough revenues to make useless and even occasional useful expenditures, almost all, instead of the hunting costume used at that time, wore a helmet and cuirass. This made Chicot ask if the wolves of Gascony had muskets and artillery in their forests.

Henry heard the question, although it was not directly addressed to him; he approached Chicot and touched him on the shoulder.

"No, my son," said he, "the wolves of Gascony have neither muskets nor artillery; but they are fierce beasts, with claws and teeth, and they lure the hunters into thickets where they run great risk of tearing their clothes on the thorns; now, they might tear a coat of silk or of velvet, and even a jacket of cloth or of leather, but they could not tear a cuirass."

"That is a reason," growled Chicot, "but not a very good one."

"What would you have?" said Henry, "I have no other."

"I must be satisfied with this, then?"

"That is what you had best do, my son."

"Very well."

"That was a 'very well' which savors of internal criticism," said Henry, laughing; "you are angry with me for having troubled you to go hunting?"

"Faith, yes."

"And you find fault?"

"Is it forbidden?"

"No, my friend, no; fault-finding is current money in Gascony."

"Well! you understand, sire, I am no hunter myself," replied Chicot, "and I must certainly occupy myself with something, I, a poor idler, who has nothing to do, while the rest of you are anticipating the flavor of the good wolves you are going to hunt with your twelve or fifteen followers."

"Ah! yes," said the king, again smiling satirically, "the clothes first, now the number; rail, rail, my dear Chicot."

"Oh, sire!"

"But I will observe to you that you are not indulgent, my son; Béarn is not as large as France. There the King always rides with two hundred huntsmen; here I set out with twelve, as you see."

"Yes, sire."

"But," continued Henry, "you will think that I am bragging, Chicot, but sometimes a thing happens here which does not happen there: sometimes here, country gentlemen, learning that I am going hunting, leave their houses, their châteaus, and their homes and join me; this sometimes makes a very passable escort for me."

"You see, sire, that I have not the good fortune to be here at such a time," said Chicot; "truly, I am having a run of ill luck."

"Who knows?" replied Henry, with his bantering laugh.

Then as they had left Nérac, cleared the gates of the town, and had been riding for almost half an hour in the country:

"See," said Henry to Chicot, raising his hand to his eyes to make a shade for them; "see, I am not mistaken, I think."

"What is it?" asked Chicot.

"Look yonder at the gates of the town of Moiras; are those not horsemen whom I see?"

Chicot raised himself in his stirrups.

"Faith, sire, I think so," said he.

"And I am sure of it."

"Horsemen, yes," said Chicot, looking with more attention; "but hunters, no."

"Why not hunters?"

"Because they are armed like Roland and Amadis," replied Chicot.

"Well! what difference do the clothes make, my dear Chicot? You have already learned by seeing us that the clothes do not make the hunter."

"But," exclaimed Chicot, "I see at least two hundred men there."

"Well? what does that prove, my son? That Moiras gives good service."

Chicot felt his curiosity sharpened more and more. The troop which Chicot had numbered at the lowest figure, for it consisted of two hundred and fifty horsemen, joined the escort silently; each of the men who composed it was well mounted and well equipped, and the whole was commanded by a good-looking man who rode up and kissed Henry's hand with courtesy and devotion.

They forded the Gers; between this river and the Garonne in a bend of ground they came upon a second troop of a hundred men; the leader approached Henry and seemed to make

excuses for not bringing him a larger number of hunters. Henry accepted his apologies and held out his hand to him.

They continued to ride and came to the Garonne; as they had crossed the Gers, so they crossed the Garonne; but as the Garonne is deeper than the Gers, when two-thirds way across they got beyond their depth, and had to swim for a distance of thirty or forty feet; yet contrary to all expectation, they reached the opposite bank of the river without accident.

"By Heaven!" said Chicot; "what exercises are you doing, sire? When you have bridges above and below Agen, you soak your cuirasses in water in this way!"

"My dear Chicot, we are savages, and must therefore be forgiven. You well know that my late brother Charles called me his wild boar; now, the wild boar — not being a hunter, you do not know this — now, the wild boar never goes out of his way; he goes straight along. Bearing his name, I imitate him; I incommode myself no more than he does. A river appears on my way, I cross it; a city rises before me, *Ventre Saint Gris!* I devour it like a pie."

This facetiousness of the Béarnais caused loud bursts of laughter from those around him. Monsieur de Mornay alone, still by the side of the king, did not laugh audibly; he merely compressed his lips, which, with him, was an indication of excessive hilarity.

"Mornay is in a very good humor to-day," said the Béarnais joyfully, into Chicot's ear; "he has just laughed at my joke."

Chicot asked himself at which of the two he ought to laugh; at the master, so happy to have made his servant laugh, or at the servant, so difficult to divert. But, more than all else, the base of Chicot's thoughts was astonishment.

On the other side of the Garonne, about half a mile from the river, three hundred horsemen, hidden in a pine forest, appeared before Chicot's eyes.

"Oh! oh! my lord," said he in a low tone to Henry; "are not these jealous people who have heard your chase spoken of, and who intend to oppose it?"

"No," said Henry, "you are mistaken again this time, my son; these men are friends who have come to us from Puymirol; true friends."

"By Heaven! sire, you will have more men in your suite than you have trees in the forest."

"Chicot, my child," said Henry, "I think, God forgive me,

that the news of your arrival has already spread through the country, and that these men are running from the four corners of the province to do honor to the King of France, from whom you come as ambassador."

Chicot had too much intelligence not to perceive that already for some time they had been making fun of him. He took umbrage at it, but not ill humor.

The day ended at Monroy, where the gentleman of the country, assembled as though they had been informed in advance that the King of Navarre was to pass, offered him a fine supper, of which Chicot did his share with enthusiasm, as they had not thought it necessary to stop on the way for a thing of such slight importance as dinner, and as consequently they had not eaten since they had left Nérac.

They had reserved for Henry the most beautiful house in town; half the troop slept in the street in which the king was; the rest outside the gates.

"When shall we begin to hunt?" asked Chicot of Henry, as the latter was having his boots taken off.

"We are not yet in the territory of the wolves, my dear Chicot," replied Henry.

"And when shall we be there, sire?"

"Anxious?"

"No, sire; but, you understand, one likes to know where one is."

"You shall know to-morrow, my son; in the meantime, go to sleep there, on the cushions at my left; see, there is Mornay already snoring at my right!"

"The deuce!" said Chicot; "he is more noisy asleep than awake."

"Yes, that is so," said Henry, "he is no prattler; but it is at the chase that he must be seen, and you shall see him."

Daylight had scarcely appeared when a loud sound of horses awoke Chicot and the King of Navarre. An old gentleman, who wished to serve the king himself, brought Henry the honey bread and the spiced wine of the morning. Mornay and Chicot were waited on by the servants of the old gentleman.

The meal over, the signal to saddle was given.

"Come, come," said Henry, "we have a long day's work before us to-day; to horse, gentlemen, to horse!"

Chicot saw with astonishment that five hundred horsemen

had increased the escort. These five hundred horsemen had arrived during the night.

"Ah!" said he, "it is not a suite that you have, sire, it is not even a troop; it is an army."

Henry replied merely by these three words:

"Wait awhile, wait."

At Lauzerte six hundred men on foot ranged themselves behind this troop of horsemen.

"Foot-soldiers!" cried Chicot; "foot-soldiers!"

"Beaters!" said the king, "nothing but beaters."

Chicot frowned, and from that moment he spoke no more.

Twenty times his eyes turned towards the country, that is to say, twenty times the idea came to him to run. But Chicot had his guard of honor, without doubt, by right of his being ambassador of the King of France. The result was that Chicot was so well recommended to this guard, as a personage of the greatest importance, that he did not make a gesture without this gesture being repeated by ten men.

This displeased him, and he spoke about it to the king.

"Well!" said Henry, "it is your fault, my child. You tried to escape from Nérac, and I am afraid you want to escape again."

"Sire," replied Chicot, "I give you my word as a gentleman that I will not even try."

"Very good."

"Moreover, I should be wrong."

"You would be wrong?"

"Yes; for by remaining, I am destined, I think, to see curious sights."

"Well! I am glad that this is your opinion, my dear Chicot, for it is mine also."

At that moment they were riding through the town of Montcuq, and four small field-pieces took their place in the army.

"I return to my first idea, sire," said Chicot, "that the wolves of this country are master wolves, and that they are treated with respect unknown to ordinary wolves; artillery for them, sire!"

"Ah! you have noticed?" said Henry; "it is a mania with the men of Montcuq; since I gave them for their exercises these four pieces which I purchased in Spain, and which were smuggled in, they drag them everywhere."

"Shall we arrive to-day, sire?" murmured Chicot.

"No, to-morrow."

"To-morrow morning or to-morrow evening?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Then," said Chicot, "it is at Cahors that we are to hunt, is it not, sire?"

"It is in that direction," said the king.

"But why, sire, did you, who have infantry and cavalry and artillery to hunt the wolf, — why did you forget to bring the royal standard? the honor you do these worthy animals would then have been complete."

"We did not forget it, Chicot, *Ventre Saint Gris!* we were careful not to; but we leave it in its case for fear of soiling it. But since you want a standard, my child, to know under what banner you are marching, we will show you a fine one. Take the standard from its case," commanded the king. "Monsieur Chicot wants to know how the arms of Navarre are embroidered."

"No, no, it is needless," said Chicot, "better leave it where it is; it is all right there."

"Then do not worry," said the king; "you will see it at the right time and place."

They spent the second night at Catus almost in the same way as they had passed the first. From the moment Chicot had given his word of honor not to escape they paid no more attention to him.

He made a tour of the town and went as far as the advanced posts. From all sides troops of one hundred, one hundred and fifty, and two hundred men joined the army.

That night was the rendezvous of the foot-soldiers.

"It is very fortunate that we are not going as far as Paris," said Chicot, "we should reach there with a hundred thousand men."

The following morning, at eight o'clock, they came in sight of Cahors with one thousand foot-soldiers and two thousand cavalry. They found the city in a state of defence; scouts had alarmed the country; Monsieur de Vesin had at once taken precautions.

"Ah! ah!" said the king, to whom Mornay communicated this news, "we are forestalled; this is annoying."

"We must make a regular siege, sire," said Mornay; "we still expect almost two thousand men, that is as many as we need, at least to counterbalance the chances."

"Let us assemble the council," said Monsieur de Turenne, "and begin the trenches."

Chicot watched everything and listened to all these words with a terrified air.

The pensive and almost pitiful look of the King of Navarre confirmed him in his suspicions that Henry was a poor soldier, and this conviction alone somewhat reassured him.

Henry had allowed every one to speak and during the discussion of various suggestions he had remained as silent as a fish.

Suddenly he emerged from his revery, raised his head, and in a commanding tone:

"Gentlemen," said he, "this is what must be done. We have three thousand men, and you are expecting two thousand, you say, Mornay?"

"Yes, sire."

"That will make five thousand in all; in a regular siege they will kill a thousand or fifteen hundred in two months; the death of these will discourage the others; we shall be obliged to raise the siege and to retreat; in retreating we shall lose a thousand others; this will be the half of our forces. Let us sacrifice five hundred men at once and take Cahors."

"How do you mean, sire?" asked Mornay.

"My dear friend, we will go straight to the gate which is nearest to us. We will find a ditch on our way; we will fill this with branches; we will leave two hundred men on the ground, but we will reach the gate."

"And then, sire?"

"Then, the gate reached, we will blow it up with petards, and take possession. It is no more difficult than that."

Chicot, thoroughly frightened, looked at Henry.

"Yes," he growled, "coward and boaster, here is indeed my Gascon; is it you, tell me, who will place the petard under the gate?"

At that instant, as though he had heard Chicot's aside, Henry added:

"Let us not lose time, gentlemen, the meat will grow cold; let us go forward, and let those who love me follow me."

Chicot approached Mornay, to whom he had not had the time to address a single word during the whole journey.

"Tell me, Monsieur le Comte," whispered he into his ear, "do all of you want to be cut to pieces?"

"Monsieur Chicot, we need that to put us in good training," replied Mornay, calmly.

"But the king will be killed!"

"Bah! his majesty has a good cuirass."

"Besides," said Chicot, "he will not be such a fool as to enter the fight, I presume?"

Mornay shrugged his shoulders and turned his back on Chicot.

"Well," said Chicot, "I like him much better asleep than awake, when he is snoring than when he is speaking; he is more polite."

CHAPTER LV.

HOW THE KING OF NAVARRE ACTED THE FIRST TIME HE SAW FIRING.

The small army advanced to within cannon shot of the city; there they breakfasted.

The meal over, two hours were given the officers and soldiers in which to rest. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, that is, there remained scarcely two hours of daylight when the king had the officers summoned to his tent.

Henry was very pale, and while he gesticulated, his hands shook so visibly that their fingers dropped like gloves hung up to dry.

"Gentlemen," said he, "we have come to take Cahors; we must take Cahors, therefore, since we have come for that purpose; but Cahors must be taken by force; force, you understand? that is, by driving in steel and wood with the flesh."

"Not bad," said Chicot, who was listening critically, "and if his gestures did not belie his words one could scarcely ask for anything else, even from Monsieur Crillon."

"Monsieur le Maréchal de Biron," continued Henry, "le Maréchal de Biron, who has sworn to have the last Huguenot hung, holds the country forty-five leagues from here. In all probability a messenger has already been despatched to him by Monsieur de Vesin. In four or five days he will be at our back; he will have ten thousand men with him; we shall be captured between him and the city. Let us then take Cahors before he arrives, and receive him as Monsieur de Vesin is prepared to receive us, but with a better fortune, I trust. In the contrary case, at least, he will have some good Catholic beams on which to hang the Huguenots, and we certainly owe him this satisfaction. Come, cheer up, cheer up, gentlemen, I will put myself at your head and, *ventre Saint Gris!* give blows, blows as though it were hailing."

This was all of the royal harangue; but it was enough, apparently, for the soldiers responded to it by enthusiastic murmurs, and the officers by frantic applause.

"A fine talker, but a Gascon still," said Chicot, aside. "How lucky it is that we do not speak with our hands! *Ventre de biche!* the Béarnais would have stammered terribly; besides, we shall see this one at work."

The little army set out under the command of Mornay to take its position.

Just as it began to march, the king came to Chicot:

"Pardon me, friend Chicot," said he, "I deceived you by talking of a hunt — of wolves and other nonsense; but really I had to do it, and it is your own idea, since you told it to me in so many words. Evidently King Henry does not wish to pay the dowry of his sister Margot, and Margot is crying and weeping for her dear Cahors. We must do what our wives wish in order to have peace in our household; so I am going to try and take Cahors, my dear Chicot."

"Why did she not ask you for the moon, sire, since you are such a kind husband," replied Chicot, piqued at the royal jokes.

"I should have tried to get it, Chicot," said the Béarnais; "I love her so dearly, this dear Margot!"

"Oh! you have quite enough with Cahors, and we shall see how you get out of it."

"Ah! that is exactly what I wanted to come to; listen, friend Chicot; the moment is supreme, and above all disagreeable. Ah! I am no great swordsman myself. I am not brave, and my nature revolts at every musket shot. Chicot, my friend, do not make too much fun of the poor Béarnais, your countryman and your friend; if I am afraid and you should notice it, do not say so."

"If you are afraid, you say?"

"Yes."

"You are afraid, then, of being afraid?"

"Without doubt."

"But then, *ventre de biche!* if that is your nature, why the devil, do you meddle in all these affairs?"

"But suppose it is necessary?"

"Monsieur de Vesin is a terrible man."

"I well know it, by heaven!"

"Who gives quarter to no one."

"You think so, Chicot?"

"Oh! I am sure of it, so far as that is concerned; red plume or white plume makes little difference to him; he will cry to the guns: 'Fire!'"

"You say that for my white plume, Chicot?"

"Yes, sire, and as you are the only one who has one of that color" —

"Well?"

"I would advise you to take it off, sire."

"But, my friend, since I wore it so that I might be recognized, if I were to take it off" —

"Well?"

"Well, my object would fail, Chicot."

"You will keep it, then, sire, notwithstanding my advice."

"Yes, certainly I will keep it."

On uttering these words, which indicated a fixed resolution, Henry trembled still more visibly than while haranguing his officers.

"Come," said Chicot, who understood nothing of this double manifestation, so different in word and gesture; "come, there is time still, sire, do not do anything foolish; you cannot mount your horse in this condition."

"I am very pale, then, Chicot?" asked Henry.

"Pale as death, sire."

"Good," said the king.

"Why good?"

"Yes, I understand myself."

Just then the noise of cannon from the fortress was heard, accompanied by the furious sound of musketry; it was Monsieur de Vesin answering the summons to surrender sent him by Duplessis Mornay.

"Well!" said Chicot, "what do you think of that music?"

"I think that it makes a devilish shiver run through my bones," replied Henry. "Come, my horse, my horse!" cried he, in a voice as abrupt and brittle as the spring of a clock.

Chicot looked at him and listened to him without comprehending anything of the strange phenomenon which was developing under his eyes.

Henry sprang into the saddle, but he had to make two attempts.

"Come, Chicot," said he, "mount too; you are no more of a warrior than I am, hey?"

"No, sire."

"Well! come, Chicot, we will be afraid together; come and see the firing, my friend, come. A good horse for Monsieur Chicot!"

Chicot shrugged his shoulders, and without moving a muscle, mounted a fine Spanish horse which was brought him by order of the king. Henry put his horse to a gallop; Chicot followed him. Upon arriving in front of his small army Henry raised the visor of his helmet.

"Out with the flag! bring out the new flag!" cried he in a tremulous voice.

They drew off the case, and the new flag, with its double escutcheon of Navarre and Bourbon, unfolded proudly in the breeze; it was white, and showed golden chains on the azure of one side, and on the other, golden fleur-de-lis with the label placed *en cœur*.

"There," said Chicot, aside, "is a flag which will be badly torn, I fear."

Just then, and as though in answer to Chicot's thought, the cannon of the fortress thundered forth, and opened an entire row in the infantry ten feet from the king.

"*Ventre Saint Gris!*" said he, "did you see, Chicot? It is in earnest, it seems to me."

And his teeth chattered.

"He is going to be ill," said Chicot.

"Ah!" murmured Henry. "Ah! you are afraid, cursed carcass. You shake, you tremble; wait, wait, I will make you tremble for something."

And driving the spurs into the flanks of the white horse which he rode, he outstripped cavalry, infantry, and artillery, and arrived within a hundred feet of the fortress, red from the fire of the batteries, which were thundering from the top of the rampart like the noise of a tempest, and which was reflected on his armor like the rays of the setting sun. There he held his horse motionless for ten minutes, his face turned towards the gate of the city, crying:

"The fascines, *ventre Saint Gris!* the fascines!"

Mornay had followed him, with visor raised and sword in hand.

Chicot followed Mornay; he had allowed them to put a cuirass on him, but he did not draw his sword.

Behind these three men dashed the young Huguenot gentlemen, inspired by the example, crying and shouting:

"NAVARRE! NAVARRE! CAHORS IS OURS! LONG LIVE NAVARRE!"

"Long live Navarre!"

The Vicomte de Turenne rode at their head, a fascine on the neck of his horse.

Chicot came up and hurled his fascine; in an instant the ditch dug under the drawbridge was filled up.

The artillery rushed forward, and, by losing thirty men out of forty, they succeeded in placing their petards under the gate.

The grape-shot and musketry whistled around Henry like a hurricane of fire; in an instant twenty men fell before his eyes.

"Forward! forward!" he cried; and he urged his horse into the midst of the artillery.

He reached the edge of the ditch just as the first petard had exploded.

The gate was broken in two pieces.

The artillery lighted the second petard.

This made a new gap in the wood; but at once twenty muskets were passed through the triple opening, and vomited forth balls upon soldiers and officers.

The men fell around the king, mowed down like ears of corn.

"Sire," said Chicot, not thinking of himself, "sire, for Heaven's sake retire!"

Mornay said nothing; but he was proud of his pupil, and from time to time strove to place himself in front of him; but Henry waved him aside with a nervous shake of the hand. Suddenly Henry felt that the perspiration was dropping from his forehead, and that a mist was passing before his eyes.

"Ah! cursed nature!" he cried; "it shall not be said that you conquered me!"

Then jumping from his horse:

"A hatchet!" he cried, "a hatchet!"

And with a strong arm he cut down muzzles of guns, fragments of oak, and iron nails.

Finally a beam gave way, the side of a gate, the side of a wall, and a hundred men rushed into the breach crying:

"Navarre! Navarre! Cahors is ours! Long live Navarre!"

Chicot had not left the king; he was with him under the arch of the gate, which Henry had been one of the first to enter, but at every musket shot he saw him tremble violently and lower his head.

"*Ventre Saint Gris!*" cried Henry, furious. "Have you ever seen such cowardice, Chicot."

"No, sire," replied the latter, "I have never seen such a coward as you are; it is frightful."

At that moment the soldiers of Monsieur de Vesin attempted to unseat Henry and his advance-guard, stationed under the gate and in the surrounding houses.

Henry met them sword in hand.

But the besieged were the stronger; they succeeded in driving back Henry and his men beyond the ditch.

"*Ventre Saint Gris!*" exclaimed the king. "I think my flag is retreating; in that case, I will carry it myself."

And by a supreme effort, he snatched the standard from the hands of the one who was carrying it, raised it into the air, and half enveloped in its waving folds returned the first one to the fortress.

"Be afraid, then!" said he; "tremble now, coward!"

The balls whistled and flattened themselves against his armor with a jarring noise and perforated the flag with a dull, heavy sound.

Messieurs de Turenne, Mornay, and a thousand others rushed into this open gate, dashing after the king.

The cannon was quiet on the outside; henceforth it was face to face, man to man, that they were to fight.

Above the din of arms was heard the noise of the muskets, the clashing of the iron, and Monsieur de Vesin crying out: "Barricade the streets! dig ditches! make battlements of the houses!"

"Oh!" said Monsieur de Turenne, who was near enough to overhear it; "the siege of the city is over, my poor Vesin!"

And, as an accompaniment to the words, he sent a pistol shot which wounded the latter in the arm.

"You are mistaken, Turenne, you are mistaken," replied Monsieur de Vesin "there are twenty sieges in Cahors; so even if you have succeeded in one, there still remain nineteen."

Monsieur de Vesin defended himself for five days and five nights, from street to street and house to house.

Luckily for the rising fortune of Henry of Navarre, he had counted too much on the walls and the garrison of Cahors, so that he had neglected to warn Monsieur de Biron.

For five days and five nights Henry commanded like a captain and fought like a soldier; for five days and five nights he slept with his head on a stone, and awoke hatchet in hand.

Each day they gained a street, a fortress, a square; each night the garrison strove to retake the conquest of the day.

At length on the fifth day, the enemy, harassed, seemed to give some rest to the Protestant army. It was Henry who attacked it in turn; they forced an intrenched post, which cost seven hundred men; almost all the good officers were wounded in it. Monsieur de Turenne was shot by a musket in the shoulder. Mornay received a stone on the head, and just escaped being killed.

The king alone was not hit; a feverish agitation, an almost unconscious audacity, had succeeded the fear which he had felt at first, and which he had so heroically conquered. All the fastenings of his armor were broken, as much by his own efforts as by the attacks of his enemies; he struck so fiercely that a blow from him never wounded a man, it killed him.

When this last post was forced, the king entered the *enceinte*, followed by the eternal Chicot, who, silent and gloomy, for five days had been seeing with despair the startling phantom of a monarchy rising at his side destined to overthrow that of the Valois.

"Well! what do you think of it, Chicot?" said the king, raising the visor of his hemlet, and seeming to read the very soul of the poor ambassador.

"Sire," murmured Chicot, sadly, "I think that you are a true king."

"And I, sire," exclaimed Mornay, "I say that you are an imprudent one; what! gauntlets off, and visor raised, when they fire at you from all sides, and see, another shot!"

In short, at that moment, a ball whistled by, cutting one of the plumes on Henry's crest. At the same instant, and as though to prove Mornay in the right, the king was surrounded by a dozen gunners from the special troop of the governor.

They had been hidden there by Monsieur de Vesin, and had fired low and accurately. The king's horse was killed, that of Mornay had its leg broken. The king fell; ten swords were raised above him.

Chicot alone remained standing; he sprang from his horse, threw himself before the king, and with his rapier made so rapid a movement that he waved aside the most advanced.

Then raising Henry, who was entangled in the harness of his horse, he led his own mount to him and said:

"Sire, you will prove to the King of France that if I have drawn sword against him, I have at least harmed no one."

Henry called Chicot to him, and embraced him with tears in his eyes.

"*Ventre Saint Gris!*" said he, "you shall belong to me, Chicot; you shall live and die with me, my child! Come, my service is as good as my heart!"

"Sire," replied Chicot, "I have but one service to follow in this world, that of my prince. Alas! he is diminishing in lustre, but I will be faithful in adverse fortune, I who scorned prosperity. Let me, therefore, serve and love my King as long as he lives. Sire, I shall soon be with him, so do not envy him his last servant."

"Chicot," replied Henry, "I claim your promise; you hear? you are dear and precious to me, and after Henry of France, you shall have Henry of Navarre for a friend."

"Yes, sire," replied Chicot, simply, respectfully kissing the hand of the king.

"Now you see, my friend," said the king, "Cahors is ours. Monsieur de Vesin will kill all his men there; but rather than retreat, I would kill all mine."

The threat was useless and Henry had no need to remain obstinate any longer. His troops, led by Monsieur de Turenne, had just carried the garrison. Monsieur de Vesin was captured.

The city surrendered.

Henry took Chicot by the hand and led him to a house, which burned, and riddled from balls, served him as general quarters; and here he dictated a letter to Monsieur de Mornay, so that Chicot might carry it to the King of France.

This letter was written in poor Latin, and concluded with these words:

"*Quod mihi dixisti profuit multum. Cognosco meos devotos, nosce tuos. Chicotus cætera expediet.*"

Which practically signified:

"That which you told me has been very useful to me. I know my faithful servants; know yours. Chicot will tell you the rest."

"And now, friend Chicot," continued Henry, "embrace me, and be careful not to stain yourself, for, God forgive me! I am as bloody as a butcher. I would gladly offer you a part of the game, if I knew that you would accept it; but I see in your

eyes that you would refuse. However, here is my ring; I want you to take it; and now, adieu, Chicot, I will not detain you longer. Hasten to France, you will win success at court by relating what you have seen."

Chicot accepted the ring and left. It took him three days to persuade himself that he had not been dreaming, and that he had not awakened in Paris, before the window of his house, under which Monsieur de Joyeuse was giving his serenades.

CHAPTER LVI.

WHAT TOOK PLACE AT THE LOUVRE ABOUT THE SAME TIME THAT CHICOT ENTERED THE TOWN OF NÉRAC.

The necessity which compelled us to follow our friend Chicot to the end of his mission has carried us somewhat away from the Louvre. For this we ask pardon of our readers. Yet it would not be just to omit any longer the details of the result of the plot of Vincennes, and the one who had been its object.

The King, after having so bravely passed through the danger, had experienced that retrospective emotion which the strongest hearts sometimes feel when the danger is over. He had therefore returned to the Louvre without saying anything. He had been a little longer than usual over his prayers, and, once given up to God, his fervor was so great that he had forgotten to thank the vigilant officers and devoted guards who had helped him escape from the peril.

Then he went to bed, astonishing his valets by the rapidity with which he made his toilet; one would have said that he was in haste to sleep in order that his ideas might be fresher and clearer for the following day.

So D'Épernon, who had remained last of all in the King's chamber, still expecting a word of thanks, had left in very bad humor, seeing that the thanks were not forthcoming.

And De Loignac, standing near the velvet portière, seeing Monsieur d'Épernon pass without uttering a word, turned abruptly to the Forty-Five and said to them:

"The King has no further need of you, gentlemen; you may go to bed."

By two o'clock that morning every one was sleeping at the Louvre.

The secret of the adventure was faithfully kept, and had nowhere leaked out. The good citizens of Paris therefore were conscientiously snoring without suspecting that they had touched with the tips of their fingers the accession to the throne of a new dynasty.

Monsieur d'Épernon had his boots taken off at once, and instead of strolling about the city with thirty horsemen or so, as was his habit, he followed the example given him by his illustrious master, and went to bed without speaking to any one.

De Loignac alone, who like the *justum et tenacem* of Horace, would not have been diverted from his duties by the fall of the world, De Loignac alone visited the posts of the Swiss, and of the French guards, who attended to their services with regularity but without excess of zeal. Three slight infractions of the laws of discipline were punished that night like serious faults. The next day, Henry, whose awakening was impatiently waited for by so many, took four cups of bouillon in bed, instead of the two which he usually took, and sent word to Monsieur d'O and Monsieur de Villequier that they were to come and work in his chamber at compiling a new financial edict.

The Queen received word to dine alone, and as she expressed, through a gentleman, some anxiety as to the health of his Majesty, Henry deigned to reply that he would receive the ladies that evening, and would have the collation in his cabinet.

The same answer was given to a gentleman of the queen mother, who for two years had been living in her hôtel at Soissons, but who sent daily to ask news of her son. The secretaries of state looked at one another with uneasiness. That morning the King was so absent-minded that their enormities in matters of extortion did not even bring a smile from his Majesty.

Now, absent-mindedness in a king is especially alarming for secretaries of state.

But, on the other hand, Henry played with Master Love, saying to him every time the animal squeezed his slender fingers between his little white teeth:

"Ah! Ah! rebel! you, too, want to bite me? Ah! Ah! little dog, you, too, attack your King? every one attempts this nowadays!"

Then Henry, with apparently as great efforts as Hercules, son of Alcimenes, used in order to subdue the Nemean lion, vanquished the monster as big as his fist by merely saying to him with indescribable satisfaction:

"Conquered, Master Love; conquered, you infamous Leaguer; Master Love, conquered! conquered! conquered!"

This was all that Messieurs d'O and Villequier, those two great diplomats who thought that no human secret could escape them, could catch on the wing. Except for these apostrophes to Master Love, Henry had been utterly silent.

If he had to sign, he signed; if he had to listen, he listened, closing his eyes so naturally that it was impossible to know whether he listened or slept.

At length three o'clock in the afternoon sounded.

The King sent for Monsieur d'Épernon.

He was told the duke was reviewing the light horse.

He demanded De Loignac.

They said that De Loignac was trying some Limousin horses.

They expected to see the King annoyed by this double check to his wish; not at all. Contrary to the general expectation, Henry, in the most careless manner in the world, began to whistle a hunting-song, a diversion to which he gave himself up only when perfectly satisfied with himself. It was evident that all the desire the King had had to keep silent since morning was changing into a growing longing to talk.

This longing finally became an irresistible need; but having no one, the King was obliged to talk all alone.

He demanded his luncheon, and while he ate had something edifying read to him, which he interrupted to say to the reader:

"It is Plutarch, is it not, who wrote the life of Sylla?"

The man, who was reading from the Scriptures, and who was interrupted by this profane question, turned to the King in astonishment.

The King repeated his question.

"Yes, sire," replied the reader.

"Do you recall the passage in which the historian relates how the dictator escaped death?"

The reader hesitated.

"Not exactly, sire," said he; "it is a long time since I read Plutarch."

At that moment they announced his eminence the Cardinal de Joyeuse.

"Ah! yes," cried the King, "here is a learned man, our friend, — he will tell us this without hesitating."

"Sire," said the cardinal, "am I fortunate enough to arrive at the right moment? that is a rare thing in this world."

"Faith, yes; you heard my question?"

"Your Majesty asked, I believe, how and under what circumstances the dictator Sylla escaped death?"

"Exactly. Can you answer me, cardinal?"

"Nothing is easier, sire."

"So much the better."

"Sylla, who had so many men put to death, sire, never risked losing his life except in combat. Does your Majesty allude to a combat?"

"Yes; and in one of the combats to which he exposed himself, I think I remember that he saw death close at hand. Open a Plutarch, if you please, cardinal; there should be one there, translated by that good Amyot, and read me this passage from the life of the Roman, in which, thanks to the speed of his white horse, he escaped the javelins of his enemies."

"Sire, there is no need to open Plutarch for that; the episode occurred in the combat in which he engaged with Teleserius, the Samnite, and Lamponius, the Lucanian."

"You ought to know that better than any one, my dear cardinal, you are so well read!"

"Your Majesty is really too good to me," replied the cardinal, bowing.

"Now," said the King, after a short pause, "now explain to me how the Roman lion who was so cruel was never disturbed by his enemies."

"Sire," said the cardinal, "I will answer your Majesty by one word from this same Plutarch."

"Answer, Joyeuse, answer."

"Carbon, the enemy of Sylla, often said: 'I have to fight at the same time a lion and a fox which dwell in the soul of Sylla; but it is the fox which gives me the greater trouble.'"

"Ah! yes, yes," replied Henry, dreamily, "it was the fox?"

"Plutarch says so, sire."

"And he is right," said the King, "he is right, cardinal. But speaking of a combat, have you received news from your brother?"

"Which one, sire? Your Majesty knows that I have four."

"I mean the Duc d'Arques, my friend."

"Not yet, sire."

"I wish that Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou, who, until now, has known so well how to act the fox, would now know a little how to act the lion!" said the King.

The cardinal did not reply, for this time Plutarch was no help to him; like a clever courtier, he feared to answer the King disagreeably by answering pleasantly for the Duc d'Anjou.

Henry, seeing that the cardinal was silent, returned to his battles with Master Love; then, signing to the cardinal to remain, he arose, dressed himself sumptuously, and passed into his cabinet, where his court was waiting for him.

It is especially at court that one feels with the same instinct one finds in mountaineers the approach or the end of storms: without any one's having spoken, without any one's having seen the King, every one was ready for the event.

The two queens were visibly uneasy. Catharine, pale and anxious, bowed a great deal and spoke in a short, jerky manner.

Louise de Vaudemont looked at no one and listened to nothing.

There were moments when the poor young woman seemed losing her reason.

The King entered.

His eyes were bright and his complexion rosy; one could read on his face a look of good humor which produced on all those gloomy countenances, waiting for a sight of his, the effect which a sunbeam produces on groves turned yellow by the autumn.

All at once became golden and purple; in an instant everything was resplendent.

Henry kissed the hand of his mother and that of his wife with the same gallantry as if he were still the Duc d'Anjou. He addressed a thousand flattering remarks to the ladies, who were not accustomed to conversation of this kind, and even went so far as to offer them sugar-plums.

"We were anxious concerning your health, my son," said Catharine, looking at the King with close attention, as though to assure herself that his complexion was not rouge, and his good humor not a mask.

"And you were wrong, madame," replied the King. "I never felt better."

He accompanied the words with a smile which passed to every lip.

"And to what happy influence, my son," demanded Catharine, with ill-concealed anxiety, "do you owe this improvement in your health?"

"To the fact of my having laughed a very great deal, madame," replied the King.

They all looked at one another in such great surprise that it seemed as if the King had just uttered an absurdity.

"Laughed a very great deal? You are able to laugh a very great deal, my son?" said Catharine, with her austere look; "in that case, you are very fortunate."

"That is what I am, madame."

"And what cause permitted you to attain such hilarity?"

"I must tell you, mother, that last evening I went to the forest of Vincennes."

"I knew it."

"Ah! you knew it?"

"Yes, my son; everything that concerns you is of interest to me; I tell you nothing new."

"No, undoubtedly; but I went to the forest of Vincennes, and on my return my light horse pointed out an enemy's army, the muskets of which were gleaming on the road."

"An enemy's army on the road from Vincennes?"

"Yes, mother."

"Where?"

"Opposite the pond of the Jacobins, near the house of our good cousin."

"Near the house of Madame de Montpensier?" cried Louise de Vaudemont.

"Exactly; yes, madame, near Bel Esbat. I approached bravely in order to engage in battle, and perceived" —

"My God! continue, sire," cried the queen, really worried.

"Oh, reassure yourself."

Madame Catharine waited anxiously, but neither a word nor a gesture betrayed her restlessness.

"I perceived," continued the King, "a whole priory of good monks who presented arms before me with belligerent shouts."

Cardinal de Joyeuse began to laugh; the entire court improved on this manifestation.

"Oh!" said the King, "laugh, laugh, you are right, for it will long be talked about. I have more than ten thousand monks in France, of whom, if need be, I shall make ten thousand musketeers; then I will create an office of grand master of the Shaven Musketeers of his very Christian Majesty, and I will give it to you, cardinal."

"Sire, I will take it; any service would be acceptable to me, provided that it pleased your Majesty."

During the conversation between the King and the cardinal the ladies, according to the etiquette of the times, had risen, and, one by one, saluted the King and left the room; the Queen followed them with her maids of honor.

The queen mother alone remained; there had been a mystery in the unusual gayety of the King which she wished to fathom.

"Ah! cardinal," suddenly said the King to the prelate, who was preparing to leave, seeing that the queen mother remained and guessing that she wished to speak to her son; "by the way, what has become of your brother Du Bouchage?"

"Why, sire, I do not know."

"What! you do not know?"

"No, I seldom see him, or rather I never see him any more," replied the cardinal.

A sad, serious voice resounded from the further end of the apartment.

"Here I am, sire," said this voice.

"Ah! it is he!" cried Henry. "Come here, count, come here."

The young man obeyed.

"Well, good God!" said the King, looking at him in astonishment; "on my honor as a gentleman, you are no longer a body but a walking skeleton."

"Sire, he works a great deal," stammered the cardinal, himself aghast at the change which eight days had wrought in the bearing and on the face of his brother.

In short, Du Bouchage was as pale as a wax statue, and his figure, beneath the silk and embroidery, partook of the rigidity and the tenuity of shadows.

"Come here, young man," said the King to him; "come here. Thanks, cardinal, for your quotation from Plutarch; in a similar case I promise always to apply to you."

The cardinal guessed that the King desired to be alone with Henry, and withdrew quietly.

The King watched him go from the corner of his eye, then turned his glance on his mother, who stood motionless.

There remained in the room only the queen mother, Monsieur d'Épernon, who was saying a thousand pretty speeches to her, and Du Bouchage.

At the door stood De Loignac, half courtier, half soldier, attending to his duty rather than to anything else.

The King seated himself and signed to Du Bouchage to approach.

"Count," said he to him, "why do you hide in this way behind the ladies? Do you not know that it pleases me to see you?"

"These kind words are a great honor for me, sire," replied the young man, bowing with profound respect.

"And, count, how comes it that we see you no more at the Louvre?"

"You see me no more, sire?"

"No, truly, and I was complaining to your brother, the cardinal, who is even more learned than I had supposed."

"If your Majesty does not see me," said Henry, "it is because you have not deigned to turn your eyes to the corner of this room. Sire, I am here every day at the hour when the King appears. In the same way I am present regularly when your Majesty rises, and I always respectfully salute you when you leave the council. Never have I missed doing so, and never shall I miss, so long as I am able to stand up, for it is a sacred duty to me."

"And it is this that makes you so sad," said Henry, kindly.

"Oh! your Majesty cannot think so."

"No, you and your brother love me."

"Sire!"

"And I love you also. By the way, you know that poor Anne has written me from Dieppe."

"I was not aware of the fact, sire."

"Yes, but you were not ignorant of the fact that he was heartbroken at going away."

"He told me of his regret at leaving Paris."

"Yes, but do you know what he told me? That there was a man who would have regretted Paris much more, and that if this command were given you, you would die."

"Perhaps, sire."

"He told me more, for your brother says many things, when he is not sulky; he told me that, in such a case, you would have disobeyed me; is this true?"

"Sire, your Majesty was right in putting my death before my disobedience."

"But after all, if you had not died of grief at the orders for leaving?"

"Sire, it would be more terrible suffering for me to obey than to die; and yet," added the young man, lowering his pale face as though to hide his embarrassment, "I should have disobeyed."

The King folded his arms and looked at Joyeuse.

"Ah!" said he, "why, you are partly mad, it seems to me, my poor count."

The young man smiled sadly.

"Oh! I am wholly so, sire," said he, "and your Majesty is wrong in sparing my condition."

"Then it is serious, my friend."

Joyeuse stifled a sigh.

"Tell me about it; come."

The young man carried his heroism as far as a smile.

"A great king such as you are, sire, cannot stoop to confidences like this."

"Yes, Henry, yes," said the King; "speak, tell me, you will amuse me."

"Sire," replied the young man, with pride, "your Majesty is mistaken; I must tell you there is nothing in my sorrow which can amuse a noble heart."

The King took the young man's hand.

"Come, come," said he, "do not be angry, Du Bouchage; you know that your King has known the pain of unrequited affection."

"I know it, yes. Sire, once" —

"I will sympathize, therefore, with your suffering."

"That is too much kindness on the part of a king."

"No; listen: because there was no one with me when I suffered as you are suffering, and nothing except the power of God, I could in no way gain help; you, on the contrary, my child, you can be aided by me."

"Sire!"

"And consequently," continued Henry, with affectionate sorrow, "you may hope to see an end to your troubles."

The young man shook his head as an indication of doubt.

"Du Bouchage," said Henry, "you shall be happy, or I will no longer be called King of France."

"Happy, I! Alas! sire, that is impossible," said the young man, with a smile mixed with inexpressible bitterness.

"And why so?"

"Because my happiness is not of this world."

"Henry," insisted the King, "your brother, on leaving, recommended you to me as to a friend. Since, in regard to what you must do, you consult neither the wisdom of your father, nor the science of your brother, the cardinal, I wish to be an elder brother to you. Come, trust me, tell me. I assure you, Du Bouchage, that, in everything except death, my power and my affection for you shall find a remedy."

"Sire," replied the young man, falling before the feet of the King, "sire, do not confuse me by the expression of a kindness to which I cannot answer. My unhappiness is without a remedy, for it is my unhappiness alone which makes my sole joy."

"Du Bouchage, you are a fool, and you will kill yourself with idle fancies; it is I who tell you so."

"I well know it, sire," replied the young man, calmly.

"But!" exclaimed the King in some impatience, "is it a marriage that you desire to make, is it influence that you wish to exert?"

"Sire, it is love that I must inspire. You see that every one is powerless to procure me this favor. I alone must win it, and win it by myself alone."

"Then why despair?"

"Because I feel that I shall never win it, sire."

"Try, try, my child; you are rich, you are young: what woman can resist the triple influence of beauty, love, and youth? There are none, Du Bouchage, there are none."

"How many men in my place would bless your Majesty for your excessive indulgence, for your favor with which you overwhelm me! To be beloved by such a king as your Majesty is almost as much as to be beloved of God."

"So you accept? Good! say nothing, if you want to be discreet; I will gain information, I will have steps taken. You know what I did for your brother. I will do as much for you; a hundred thousand crowns shall not stop me."

Du Bouchage seized the hand of the King and pressed it to his lips.

"May your Majesty some day demand my blood," said he, "and I will spill it to the last drop, to prove to you how grateful I am for the help I refuse!"

Henry III. turned on his heel in vexation.

"Truly," said he, "these Joyeuses are more stubborn than the Valois. Here is one who daily brings me his long face and his eyes encircled in black; how cheerful this will be! there are already too many bright faces at court!"

"Oh! sire, never mind," exclaimed the young man, "I will lay fever on my cheeks like bright rouge, and every one on seeing me smile will believe that I am the happiest of men."

"Yes, but I, I; I shall know the contrary, obstinate wretch, and this knowledge will make me sad."

"Will your Majesty permit me to retire?" demanded Du Bouchage.

"Yes, my child, go, and try to be a man."

The young man kissed the hand of the King, bowed to the queen mother, passed proudly by D'Épernon, who did not salute him, and went out.

Scarcely had he crossed the threshold when the King cried:

"Close the doors, Nambu."

At once the usher to whom this order was addressed announced in the antechamber that the King would receive no one else.

Then Henry approached the Duc d'Épernon, and touched him on the shoulder.

"La Valette," said he, "this evening you will have some money given to your Forty-Five, and you will grant them leave of absence for a day and night; I want them to enjoy themselves. By the mass! they saved me, those fellows saved me, like the white horse of Sylla."

"Saved?" said Catharine, in astonishment.

"Yes, mother."

"Saved from what?"

"Ah! that is it! ask D'Épernon."

"I ask you yourself, which is still better, it seems to me."

"Well, madame, our very dear cousin, the sister of your good friend Monsieur de Guise — Oh! do not deny it, he is your good friend."

Catharine smiled like a woman who says:

"He will never understand."

The King saw the smile, compressed his lips, and continued:

"The sister of your good friend De Guise set an ambuscade for me yesterday."

"An ambuscade?"

"Yes, madame; yesterday I just escaped being arrested, assassinated, perhaps" —

"By Monsieur de Guise?" cried Catharine.

"You do not believe it?"

"No, I confess it, I do not."

"D'Épernon, my friend, for the love of Heaven relate the adventure in full to madame the queen mother. If I were to speak and she should continue to shrug her shoulders as she is now shrugging them, I should fly into a passion, and I have no health left."

Then turning to Catharine:

"Adieu, madame, adieu; love Monsieur de Guise as much as you please; I have already had Monsieur de Salcède broken on the wheel, you remember?"

"Without doubt."

"Well! Let Messieurs de Guise do as you do, let them not forget."

This said, the King shrugged his shoulders higher than his mother had shrugged hers, and reëntered his apartment, followed by Master Love, who was forced to run in order to keep up with him.

CHAPTER LVII.

RED PLUME AND WHITE PLUME.

Having returned to the men, let us return a little to facts. It was eight o'clock in the evening and the house of Robert Briquet, solitary, sad, and without a light, stood with its triangular form outlined against a cloudy sky, which was evidently more disposed toward rain than moonlight. This sorry-looking house, the soul of which one felt had departed, was a worthy counterpart of that mysterious house to which we have already had the honor of introducing our readers, and which stood opposite. Philosophers, who pretend that nothing lives, speaks, or feels like inanimate things, would have

said on seeing the two houses that they were yawning in each other's faces.

Not far from there a great sound of brass was heard, mingled with confused voices, vague murmurs, and yelping as if some Corybantes in a cave were celebrating the mysterious rites of the kind goddess.

It was probably this noise which attracted thither a young man in a violet cap with a red plume, and a gray cloak. He was a good-looking horseman, and stood for several minutes before this hubbub, then walked slowly back, thoughtful and with bent head, toward the house of Maître Robert Briquet.

Now, this clashing symphony of brass was the noise of the saucepans; those vague murmurs that of pots boiling on braziers and spits turned by the paws of dogs; the cries those of Maître Fournichon, the host of *The Proud Chevalier*, busy with the care of his furnaces; and the screaming that of Dame Fournichon, who was making ready the boudoirs in the turrets.

When the young man of the violet cap had looked well at the fire, thoroughly inhaled the odor of fowl, and carefully investigated the curtains at the windows, he retraced his steps and then began his survey again.

But, however free his walk might seem at first glance, there was a limit which the walker never passed; this was a kind of gutter which ran across the street in front of the house of Robert Briquet, and terminated in the mysterious house.

However, it must be admitted that every time the man reached this limit he found there, like a watchful sentinel, another young man of almost the same age as himself, wearing a black cap with a white plume, and a violet cloak. This young man, with his scowling brow, fixed glance, and his hand on his sword, seemed like the giant Adamastor to say:

"You shall go no further without meeting a tempest."

The walker of the red plume, that is the first whom we introduced on the scene, had taken almost twenty turns without noticing all this, so preoccupied was he. Of course he had not failed to see a man walking like himself on the highway, but the man was too well dressed for a robber, and the idea never entered his head to be uneasy about anything, except in regard to that which was going on at *The Proud Chevalier*.

The gloomy face of the other, on the contrary, looked blacker and blacker at each return of the red plume; finally, the dose

of irritated fluid became so heavy to the white plume that it attracted the attention of the red plume.

The latter raised his head and read on the face of the one opposite him the whole of the evil wish which he seemed to feel in his glance.

This naturally led him to think that he was annoying the young man; then this thought brought the desire to find out in what respect he was annoying him.

Consequently he set himself attentively to watch the house of Robert Briquet.

From this house his eyes passed to its counterpart. Finally, when he had looked well at both, without being troubled or at least without appearing to be troubled by the way in which the young man of the white plume was watching him, he turned and went back to the shining fires of Maître Fournichon.

The white plume, happy at having routed his adversary, for he attributed the reverse movement which he had just seen him make to a rout, — the white plume began to walk in his direction, that is, from east to west, while the other went from west to east. But when each had arrived at the point which he had mentally marked for the limit of his course, he turned and came back in a straight line towards the other, and in so straight a line that had it not been for the gutter, a new Rubicon which had to be crossed, they would have run into each other, so scrupulously respected was the precision of the straight line.

The white plume twirled his small mustache with a visible movement of impatience.

The red plume assumed a surprised air, and threw another glance at the mysterious house.

Then one might have seen the white plume take a step to cross the Rubicon, but the red plume was already in the distance; the reverse line of march began anew.

For five minutes one might have thought that they would meet only at the antipodes; but before long both returned with the same instinct and the same precision as the first time.

Like two clouds which, under contrary winds, follow the same zone of the sky, and which one sees advancing towards each other and unfurling their black flakes, prudent advance guards, the two men this time came face to face with each other, resolved to walk on each other's toes rather than retreat one step.

More impatient, no doubt, than the one he had just met, the white plume, instead of standing on the edge of the gutter, as he had done until then, strode across the said gutter and made his adversary retreat. The latter had not suspected this act of aggression, and having his two hands held under his cloak, almost lost his balance.

"Ah! monsieur," said the latter, "are you mad or do you mean to insult me?"

"Monsieur, I intend to make you understand that you are greatly annoying me; it even appears to me that you perceive this, without my needing to tell you."

"Not at all, monsieur, for my theory is never to see what I do not wish to see."

"However, there are some things which would attract your attention, I trust, if they were made to shine before your eyes."

And suiting the action to his words, the young man of the white plume threw off his cape and drew his sword, which gleamed in a ray of moonlight which just then stole out from between two clouds.

The red plume stood motionless.

"One would say, monsieur," replied he, shrugging his shoulders, "that you had never taken a sword from its sheath, you are in such haste to draw it out against one who cannot defend himself."

"No, but who will defend himself, I hope."

The red plume smiled with a calmness which increased the irritation of his adversary.

"Why so? and what right have you to prevent my walking in the street?"

"Why are you walking in this street?"

"By Heaven, a fine question! because it pleases me."

"Ah! it pleases you?"

"Certainly. You walk here yourself; have you permission from the King to trample down the pavement of the street De Bussy by yourself?"

"Whether I have permission or not matters little."

"You are mistaken; it matters greatly, on the contrary. I am a faithful servant of his Majesty, and would not disobey him."

"Ah! you are joking, I suppose!"

"What if I were? You threaten, do you?"

"Heavens and earth! I tell you that you annoy me, monsieur, and that if you do not go away voluntarily, I will remove you by force."

"Oh, oh, monsieur, that remains to be seen!"

"Well! by Heaven! that is what I told you an hour ago; so!"

"Monsieur, I have particular business in this quarter. You are warned, therefore. Now, if it is an absolute desire on your part, I will gladly exchange a pass of the sword; but I will not go away."

"Monsieur," said the white plume, making his sword whistle and gathering himself up like a man preparing to put himself on guard, "I am Count Henry du Bouchage, brother to Monsieur le Duc de Joyeuse; for the last time, will it please you to let me pass and to take yourself off?"

"Monsieur," replied the red plume, "I am the Vicomte Ernauton de Carmainges. You do not annoy me at all, and I see no objection whatever to your staying here."

Du Bouchage reflected an instant, and then returned his sword to its sheath.

"Excuse me, monsieur," said he, "I am in love and half mad."

"I also am in love," replied Ernauton, "but I do not consider myself a fool on that account."

Henry turned pale.

"You are in love?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"And you admit it?"

"Since when has it been a crime?"

"But in love with some one in this street?"

"For the time being, yes."

"In Heaven's name, monsieur, tell me with whom you are in love."

"Ah! Monsieur du Bouchage, you have not reflected on what you ask of me; you well know that a gentleman cannot reveal a secret of which he knows but the half."

"That is true; pardon, Monsieur de Carmainges, but truly, no one under Heaven is as wretched as I am."

There was such genuine pain and eloquent despair in the last words uttered by the young man that Ernauton was deeply touched.

"Oh! my God! I understand," said he; "you are afraid that we shall be rivals."

"I fear so."

"Humph!" said Ernauton. "Well, monsieur, I will be frank."

Joyeuse grew pale, and passed his hand across his forehead.

"I," continued Ernauton, "have an appointment."

"You have an appointment?"

"Yes, in good form."

"In this street?"

"In this street."

"Written?"

"Yes, in a very pretty handwriting, too."

"From a woman?"

"No, a man."

"A man! What do you mean?"

"Nothing except what I say. I have an appointment with a woman, written by a man; it is not exactly so mysterious, but it is more elegant; she has a secretary, apparently."

"Ah!" murmured Henry, "finish, monsieur; in Heaven's name, finish!"

"You ask me in such a way, monsieur, that I do not know how to refuse you. I will, therefore, tell you the purport of the note."

"I am listening."

"You will see if the affair is one and the same as yours."

"Enough, monsieur, for pity's sake. No appointment has been made with me, nor have I received any note."

Ernauton drew a small sheet of paper from his purse.

"There is the note, monsieur," said he; "it would be difficult for me to read it to you this dark night; but it is short, and I know it by heart; you feel sure that I will not deceive you?"

"Oh, perfectly!"

"Here are the terms in which it is couched:

"'Monsieur Ernauton: My secretary is charged by me to say to you that I have a great desire to talk with you for an hour; your merit has touched me.'"

"That is there?" demanded Du Bouchage.

"Faith! yes, monsieur, the phrase is even underlined. I will pass by another sentence somewhat too flattering."

"And you are expected?"

"That is, I am waiting, as you see."

"Then they will open the door for you?"

"No, they are to whistle three times from the window."

Henry, trembling from head to foot, laid one of his hands on the arm of Ernauton, and with the other pointing to the mysterious house:

"From here?" he asked.

"Not at all," replied Ernauton, indicating the turrets of *The Proud Chevalier*, "from there."

Henry gave a cry of delight.

"But you are not going here, then?" said he.

"Why, no! the note says positively the inn of *The Proud Chevalier*."

"Oh! bless you, monsieur," said the young man, pressing the hand of the other. "Ah! forgive my discourtesy, my foolishness. Alas! you know that for a man who is really in love there is but one woman, and seeing you constantly return to that house, I thought that it was this woman who was expecting you."

"I have nothing to forgive, monsieur," said Ernauton, smiling, "for truly, for an instant, I myself had the idea that you were in this street for the same purpose as myself."

"And you had the incredible patience to say nothing to me, monsieur! Oh! you are not in love, you are not in love!"

"Faith, listen, I have no great reason, as yet; I was waiting for some explanation before growing angry. These great ladies have such strange fancies, and a mystery is so amusing!"

"Come, come, Monsieur de Carmainges, you are not in love, as I am, and yet"—

"And yet?" repeated Ernauton.

"And yet you are happier."

"Ah! are they cruel in that house?"

"Monsieur de Carmainges," said Joyeuse, "for three months I have been madly in love with the woman who lives there; and I have not yet had the happiness of hearing the sound of her voice."

"The devil! you are not very far advanced. But, listen!"

"What?"

"Was not that a whistle?"

"Yes, it seems to me I heard one."

The two young men listened; a second whistle came from the direction of *The Proud Chevalier*.

"Monsieur le Comte," said Ernauton, "you will excuse me for not remaining longer with you, but I think that is my signal."

A third whistle was heard.

"Go, monsieur, go," said Henry, "and good luck to you!"

Ernauton walked briskly away, and Du Bouchage saw him disappear in the darkness of the street, reappear in the light which came from the windows of *The Proud Chevalier*, and again disappear.

As to himself, he was gloomier than before, for that kind of an encounter had brought him out of his lethargy for an instant.

"Well," said he, "let us carry out our customary programme, and knock as usual on the cursed door which never opens."

And saying these words, he advanced, hesitatingly, to the door of the mysterious house.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE DOOR OPENS.

But upon reaching the door of the mysterious house poor Henry was seized with his usual hesitation.

"Courage," said he to himself, "let us knock!"

And he took another step.

But before knocking he gave a last glance behind him, and saw on the road the brilliant reflection from the lights of the inn.

"There," said he to himself, "men enter for love and joy, who are invited and who have not even desired to be. Why have I not a tranquil heart and careless smile? I too might perhaps enter there instead of vainly trying to enter here."

The clock of Saint Germain des Prés was heard striking sadly in the distance.

"Come, that is ten o'clock," murmured Henry.

He reached the threshold of the door and raised the knocker.

"A frightful life mine!" he murmured, "the life of an old man. Oh! when shall I be able to say: 'Beautiful death, smiling death, gentle tomb, greeting'?"

He knocked a second time.

"So it is," he continued, listening; "there is the sound of the inner door creaking, the groaning of the stairs, the noise of approaching footsteps; always this way, always the same."

And he knocked a third time.

"Another knock," said he, "the last. So it is; the step becomes lighter, the servant looks out from the iron trellis, he sees my pale, sinister, insufferable face, then he goes away, without ever opening the door."

The cessation of all sounds seemed to justify the prediction of the wretched young man.

"Adieu, cruel house; adieu until to-morrow," said he.

And stooping down so that his forehead was on a level with the stone threshold, he impressed thereon, from the depths of his soul, a kiss which might have made the hard granite tremble, for it was less hard than the hearts of the occupants of the house. Then he started to walk away as he had done the day before, and as he expected to do on the following day. But scarcely had he gone two steps when, to his great surprise, the bolt grated in its staple; the door opened and the servant bowed low.

He was the same man whose portrait we traced at the time of his interview with Robert Briquet.

"Good evening, monsieur," said he, in a rasping voice; but the sound seemed to Du Bouchage sweeter than the softest songs of cherubims one hears in dreams of childhood, when one still dreams of Heaven.

Trembling, distracted, Henry, who had already gone ten feet away, quickly returned, and clasping his hands, he staggered so visibly that the servant took hold of him to prevent his falling on the threshold. The man did it, moreover, with a visible expression of respectful compassion.

"Come, monsieur," said he, "here I am; tell me, I beg you, what you desire?"

"I have loved so deeply," replied the young man, "that I know not if I still love. My heart has beaten so that I cannot tell if it still beats."

"Monsieur," said the servant, respectfully, "will you kindly sit down beside me and talk?"

"Oh, yes."

The servant made him a sign with his hand.

Henry obeyed this sign as he would have obeyed a gesture of the King of France or of the Roman emperor.

"Speak, monsieur," said the servant, when they were seated beside each other, "and tell me your wish."

"My friend," replied Du Bouchage, "to-day is not the first time that we have spoken to each other and been near each other. Many times, you know, I have waited for you and surprised you at the corner of some street; I have offered you gold enough to make you rich, had you been the most avaricious of men; at other times I have tried to intimidate you; never have you listened to me, you have always seen me suffering, and apparently at least without pitying me. To-day you tell me to speak to you, you ask me to state my wish; what has happened, my God! and what new misfortune is hidden for me under this condescension on your part?"

The servant heaved a sigh. Evidently beneath his rough exterior he had a sympathetic heart.

The sigh was heard by Henry, and it encouraged him.

"You know," he continued, "that I love, and how I love; you have seen me follow a woman and find her, in spite of her efforts to hide and run from me; never in my deepest griefs has a bitter word escaped me; never have I given way to those thoughts of violence which are born of despair and of the counsels which fiery youth breathes into us with the heat of the blood."

"That is true, monsieur," said the servant, "and in this full justice is done you by my mistress and myself."

"But, you will admit," continued Henry, pressing the hands of the vigilant guardian between his own; "you will admit, will you not, that any evening, when you refused me entrance to this house, I could have broken in the door, as is done daily by the most insignificant student, drunk or in love? And in this way, had it been but for a moment, I could have seen this inexorable woman, and could have spoken with her."

"That is true also."

"Finally," continued the young count, with inexpressible sweetness and sadness, "I am something in this world, my name is great, my fortune is large, my credit assured, the King himself, the King, protects me; only a short time ago his Majesty advised me to confide my grief to him, told me to have recourse to him, and offered me his help."

"Ah!" said the servant, in evident anxiety.

"I did not wish it," the young man hastened to say; "no, no, I refused everything, everything, in order to come and beg

you with clasped hands to open this door which I well know is never opened."

"Monsieur le Comte, you have a loyal heart indeed, and are worthy of being loved."

"Well!" interrupted Henry, with a sad contraction of the heart, "this man of the loyal heart, and who, in your opinion, is worthy of being loved, to what do you condemn him? Every morning my page brings a letter. It is not even received; every evening I come myself to knock at this door, and every evening I am refused; in fact, you let me suffer, despair, die in the street, without having for me the pity you would feel for a poor howling dog. Ah! my friend, I tell you this woman has not the heart of a woman. An unfortunate wretch is not loved, so be it. Ah! my God! we can no more command our hearts to love than to tell them not to love; but we have pity for an unhappy man who suffers, and we give him a word of consolation; we are sorry for a wretched man who falls, and we hold out our hand to help him rise; but, no, no, this woman delights in my punishment; this woman has no heart; no, for had she had a heart, she would have killed me with a refusal from her lips or would have had me killed with the blow of a knife, with the thrust of a dagger; dead, I would at least no longer suffer."

"Monsieur le Comte," replied the servant, after having patiently listened to every word the young man had uttered, "the lady you accuse, believe me, is far from having a heart as cold, and above all, as cruel, as you say; she suffers more than you, and she feels for you a sincere sympathy."

"Oh! pity! pity!" cried the young man, wiping away the cold perspiration which ran down his temples, "oh! may the day come when her heart, which you praise, shall know love, love such as I feel; and if, in exchange for this love, she has pity offered her, I shall be well avenged."

"Monsieur le Comte, Monsieur le Comte, not to have responded to love is no reason for not having loved; this woman has perhaps experienced a stronger passion than you will ever know; this woman has perhaps loved as you will never love."

Henry raised his hands to Heaven.

"When one loves in this way one loves forever," he cried.

"Have I told you that she no longer loves, Monsieur le Comte?" asked the servant.

Henry gave a cry of pain and sank down as though he had been struck by death.

"She loves?" he exclaimed; "she loves! Ah! my God! my God!"

"Yes, she loves; but you need not be jealous of the man she loves, Monsieur le Comte; this man is no longer of this world. My mistress is a widow," added the sympathetic servant, hoping by these words to calm the young man's grief.

And, in fact, as by magic, the words brought back breath, life, and hope.

"Well, in the name of Heaven," said he, "do not abandon me! She is a widow, you say; then she must have been so but a short time, and she will exhaust the source of her tears. She is a widow — ah! my friend, in that case she loves no one, since she loves a corpse, a shadow, a name. Death is less than absence; to tell me that she loves a dead man is to tell me that she will love. Ah! my God! every great grief grows calm with time. When the widow of Mausole, who had vowed eternal grief at the tomb of her husband, when the widow of Mausole had exhausted her tears, she was cured. Regret is a malady; whoever is not carried away in a crisis comes out from the crisis more vigorous and more vivacious than before."

The servant shook his head.

"This lady, Monsieur le Comte," he replied, "like the wife of King Mausole, vowed eternal fidelity to the dead; I know her, and she will keep her word better than the forgotten woman of whom you tell me kept hers."

"I will wait, I will wait ten years, if necessary!" cried Henry; "God will not allow her to die of grief, or to cut short her days violently; you readily see that since she is not dead, she can live, and that since she lives, I may hope."

"Oh! young man, young man," said the servant in a mournful tone, "do not count thus on the sad thoughts of the living, on the demands of the dead. She has lived, you say? yes, she has lived! not one day, not one month, not one year; she has lived seven years!"

Joyeuse gave a start.

"But do you know why, for what object, to accomplish what resolution, she has lived? She will be consoled, you hope? Never, Monsieur le Comte, never! It is I who tell you this, I who swear it to you, I who was but the very humble servant of the dead, I who as long as he lived was a pious,

ardent soul, full of hope, and who since his death have become hard of heart; well! I, I, who am only her servant, I repeat it, I shall never grow reconciled to it."

"This man who is so deeply regretted," interrupted Henry, "this fortunate dead man, this husband" —

"He was not her husband, he was her lover, Monsieur le Comte, and a women like the one whom, unfortunately, you love has but one love throughout her whole lifetime."

"My friend, my friend!" cried the young man, frightened at the savage majesty of the high-minded man, who was lost, however, under ordinary clothes, — "my friend, I beseech you, intercede for me!"

"I!" he exclaimed, "I! listen. Monsieur le Comte, had I thought you capable of using violence towards my mistress, I should have killed you with this hand," and he drew from under his cloak a nervous, sinewy arm which seemed that of a man of scarcely twenty-five years of age, though his white locks and bent figure gave him the appearance of a man of sixty.

"If," he continued, "on the contrary, I had dreamed that my mistress could love you, it is she who would have been killed. Now, Monsieur le Comte, I have said what I have had to say, do not try to make me tell more; for on my honor, — and although I am not a gentleman, believe me, my honor is worth something, — for on my honor, I have said all that I can."

Henry rose, sick at heart.

"I thank you," said he, "for having had this consideration for my grief; now I have come to a decision."

"So you will be more calm in future, Monsieur le Comte; you will go away from us, and leave us to a fate worse than yours, believe me."

"Yes, I will indeed go away from you, rest assured," said the young man, "and forever."

"You wish to die? I understand you."

"Why should I hide it from you? I cannot live without her; I must die the moment I cannot possess her."

"Monsieur le Comte, I have very often spoken of death with my mistress. Believe me, it is a bad death that one brings about by one's own hand."

"Therefore it is not that one which I shall choose; for a young man of my name, age, and fortune there is a death which always has been a beautiful death, that which comes to one in defending one's king and country."

"If you suffer beyond your strength, if you owe nothing to those who will outlive you, if death on the field of battle is open to you, die, Monsieur le Comte, die; I myself should have been dead long ago had I not been condemned to live."

"Farewell, and thanks," replied Joyeuse, holding out his hand to the unknown servant.

And he went rapidly away, throwing a heavy purse of gold at the feet of the man, who was touched by his deep grief.

Midnight struck from the church of Saint Germain des Prés.

CHAPTER LIX.

HOW A GREAT LADY LOVED IN THE YEAR OF GRACE 1586.

The three whistles which had been given at equal intervals were those which were to serve as a signal to the fortunate Ernauton.

When the young man reached the house, he found Dame Fournichon at the door, where she was waiting for patrons with a smile which made her resemble a mythological goddess interpreted by a Flemish painter.

Dame Fournichon still held in her large white hands a gold crown, which, on passing, another hand just as white but more delicate than hers had placed there.

She looked at Ernauton and, placing her hands on her lips, filled the capacity of the doorway so as to render all passing impossible.

Ernauton, on his side, stopped like a man asking to enter.

"What do you want, monsieur?" said she; "and whom do you want?"

"Were not three whistles given just now from the window of this tower, my good woman?"

"Yes."

"Well! I am the one the three whistles called."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"Then it is different, if you give me your word of honor."

"The honor of a gentleman, my dear Madame Fournichon."

"In that case, I will believe you; enter, handsome cavalier, enter."

And happy at finally having one of the patrons she had so ardently desired for the unfortunate *Rose-tree of Love*, which had been dethroned by *The Proud Chevalier*, the hostess had Ernauton mount the winding staircase which led to the most ornamented and the most discreet of her towers. A small door, rather vulgarly painted, gave access to a sort of antechamber, and from this antechamber one came to the tower itself. This was furnished, decorated, and carpeted with somewhat more luxury than one would have expected in this remote corner of Paris; but, it must be admitted, Dame Fournichon had used taste in the embellishment of the tower, her favorite room, and one usually succeeds in what one does for love.

Madame Fournichon therefore had succeeded as much as it is possible for a rather ordinary mind to succeed in such things. When the young man entered the antechamber he smelled a strong odor of benzoin and aloes; it was a holocaust carried on, no doubt, by the somewhat too susceptible person who, while waiting for Ernauton, was trying to fight, with the aid of vegetable perfumes, the culinary vapors exhaled from the spit and the saucepans.

Dame Fournichon followed the young man step by step. She pushed him from the stairway into the antechamber, and from the antechamber into the tower, her eyes made small by Anacreontic twinkling; then she withdrew.

Ernauton stood with his right hand on the portière, his left hand on the latch of the door, half bending from his salutation.

He perceived in the voluptuous half-light of the tower, brightened by a single wax taper, the elegant figure of a woman, such as always commands, if not love, at least attention, if indeed it be not desire.

Reclining among cushions, completely enveloped in silk and velvet, this woman, whose tiny foot hung from the end of the couch, was occupied in burning in the candle the remains of a small branch of aloes, toward which she occasionally leaned, in order to inhale it, the smoke blowing into her face, thus filling with its vapor the folds of her hood and her hair, as though she wished to be thoroughly permeated with the intoxicating smoke.

Now, from the way in which she threw the remainder of the branch into the fire, and dropped her skirt over her foot and

hid her masked face, Ernauton perceived that she had heard him enter and knew he was near her.

However, she did not turn.

Ernauton waited a moment; she did not move.

"Madame," said the young man, in a voice which he strove to render gentle by force of gratitude, "madame, you have sent for your humble servant; here he is."

"Ah! very good," said the lady, "be seated, I beg you, Monsieur Ernauton."

"Pardon me, madame, but before everything else I ought to thank you for the honor you do me."

"Ah! that is courteous, and you are right, Monsieur de Carmainges, and yet you do not know whom you are thanking, I presume."

"Madame," said the young man, approaching by degrees, "you have hidden your face behind a mask, your hand is concealed by gloves; just as I entered you robbed me of the sight of a foot, which certainly would have made me mad about your whole person; I see nothing which allows me to recognize you; therefore I can only guess."

"And you guess who I am?"

"She whom my heart desires, she whom my imagination paints as young, beautiful, and rich, too rich and even too powerful for me to think that what is happening to me is indeed real, and that I am not now dreaming."

"Did you have much trouble in entering?" asked the lady, without replying directly to the flood of words which escaped from the overflowing heart of Ernauton.

"No, madame, I had less trouble in gaining admission than I should have supposed."

"For a man, everything is easy, it is true; but it is not so for a woman."

"I greatly regret, madame, all the trouble which you have taken, and for which I can only offer you my very humble thanks."

But the lady already appeared to have passed on to another thought.

"What were you saying to me, monsieur?" said she, carelessly removing her glove to show a hand at once adorably plump and slender.

"I was saying to you, madame, that without having seen

your features, I know who you are, and that without fear of being mistaken, I can tell you that I love you."

"Do you think you can answer for it that I am indeed the one you expected to find here?"

"In default of seeing, my heart says so."

"You know me, then?"

"Yes, I know you."

"Truly, for a native of the provinces, who has scarcely arrived, you already know the women of Paris!"

"Among all the women of Paris, madame, I know as yet only one."

"And that one is myself?"

"I think so."

"And how do you recognize me?"

"By your voice, your grace, and your beauty."

"By my voice, I understand that, for I cannot disguise it; by my grace, I can accept the word as a compliment; but by my beauty, I cannot admit the answer except by hypothesis."

"How so, madame?"

"You say you recognize me by my beauty, and my beauty is veiled."

"It was less so, madame, the day when, in order to aid you in entering Paris, I held you so close to me that your breast touched my shoulder, and your breath burned my cheek."

"So, upon the receipt of my letter, you guessed that it was from me?"

"Oh! no, no, madame, do not suppose so. Not for a single instant did I have such an idea. I thought that I was the butt of some joke, the victim of some mistake; I thought that I was threatened by one of those catastrophes called good luck; and it is only a few minutes ago, on seeing you, on touching you" —

And Ernauton attempted to take a hand which was withdrawn from his.

"Enough," said the lady; "the fact is I have committed a great piece of folly."

"In what respect, madame, I pray you?"

"In what respect! you say that you know me, and you ask me in what respect I have acted foolishly."

"Oh! that is true, madame, and I am very insignificant, very obscure beside your highness."

"Now, for Heaven's sake do me the kindness to hush, monsieur! Have you no sense?"

"What have I done, madame, in Heaven's name?" asked Ernauton, frightened.

"What! you see me masked" —

"Well?"

"If I wear a mask, it is probably with the idea of disguising myself, and you address me as 'highness!' Why do you not open the window and shout out my name in the street?"

"Oh! forgive me, forgive me," said Ernauton, falling on his knees, "I relied on the discretion of these walls."

"It seems to me that you are credulous?"

"Alas, madame, I am in love!"

"And you are convinced that I shall at once respond to this love by a similar love?"

Ernauton arose, thoroughly piqued.

"No, madame," he replied.

"What do you think, then?"

"I think that you have something important to say to me, that you did not wish to receive me at the Hôtel de Guise, or in your house at Bel Esbat, and that you preferred a secret conversation in a remote place."

"You thought that?"

"Yes."

"And what do you think that I have to say to you? Come, speak; I should not be angry at appreciating your perspicacity."

And the lady, under her apparent indifference, in spite of herself, showed a certain anxiety.

"Why, how do I know?" replied Ernauton. "Something concerning Monsieur de Mayenne, perhaps."

"Have I not my couriers, monsieur, who to-morrow evening will have told me more about him than you can tell me, since you have told me all that you know?"

"Possibly some question to ask me concerning the event of last night?"

"Ah! what event, and of what are you speaking?" asked the lady, whose bosom heaved perceptibly.

"Of the panic experienced by Monsieur d'Épernon, of the arrest of the Lorraine gentlemen."

"Some Lorraine gentlemen were arrested?"

"Twenty of them, who were found at the wrong time on the road to Vincennes."

"Which is also the road to Soissons, the town in which

Monsieur de Guise keeps his garrison, I believe. Ah! yes, Monsieur Ernauton, you are at court, and can tell me why these gentlemen were arrested."

"I at court?"

"Without doubt."

"You know that, madame?"

"Well! in order to have your address I had to gain information. But finish your sentences, for the love of God! You have a deplorable habit of turning the conversation; what has been the result of this blundering affair?"

"Absolutely nothing, madame; at least, so far as I know."

"Then why did you think that I would speak of something which has had no result?'

"I am wrong this time as before, madame, and I acknowledge my mistake."

"What, monsieur! now from what country do you come?"

"From Agen."

"What, monsieur, you are a Gascon! for Agen is in Gascony, I believe."

"Practically."

"You are a Gascon, and you are not vain enough to suppose that merely because I saw you the day of the execution of Salcède, at the Porte Saint Antoine, I thought you good looking?"

Ernauton blushed and grew disconcerted. The lady continued imperturbably:

"That I met you in the street, and I found you handsome?"

Ernauton became scarlet.

"That finally, as bearer of a message from my brother Mayenne, you came to my house, and that I found you greatly to my liking?"

"Madame, madame, I do not think all this, God forgive me."

"Then you were wrong," replied the lady, turning towards Ernauton for the first time, and fixing on his eyes two flaming eyes of her own from behind the mask, while beneath the panting gaze of the young man she displayed the charm of a bent figure, outlined in rounded and voluptuous curves against the velvet of the cushions.

Ernauton clasped his hands.

"Madame! madame!" he exclaimed, "are you making fun of me?"

"Faith no!" said she in the same easy tone; "I say that you pleased me, and it is the truth."

"My God!"

"And you yourself, did you not dare to tell me that you loved me?"

"But when I declared that I did not know who you were, madame, and now that I do know, oh! I very humbly beg your pardon."

"Well, now he is losing his reason," murmured the lady, with impatience. "But remain what you are, monsieur, and say what you think, or you will make me regret my having come."

Ernauton fell on his knees.

"Speak, madame," said he, "speak, that I may be convinced this is not a play, and perhaps I may dare to answer you."

"So be it. This is my plan concerning you," said the lady, pushing Ernauton away, as she carefully arranged the folds of her gown. "I have a liking for you, but I do not yet know you. I am not accustomed to resist my fancies, but I am not foolish enough to make mistakes. Had we been equal I should have received you at my house, and should have studied you at my ease before you had even suspected my intentions regarding you; but that was impossible; it was necessary to arrange otherwise and hasten the meeting. Now you know what you may expect from me. Become worthy of me; this is all that I can recommend to you."

Ernauton exhausted himself in protestations.

"Oh! less warmth, Monsieur de Carmainges, I beg you," said the lady, carelessly; "it is not worth while. Perhaps it was merely your name which struck me the first time we met, and which pleased me. After all, I really think that I have only a fancy for you and that it will pass. However, do not think yourself too far from perfection and begin to despair. I cannot endure perfect people. Oh! I adore devoted men, for instance. Remember this, I will allow you to do so, handsome cavalier."

Ernauton was beside himself. The haughty language, the gestures full of voluptuous grace, the proud superiority, the easy manner towards him, from so illustrious a person, plunged him at once into the most exquisite delight and terror.

He seated himself beside his beautiful and proud mistress, who let him do so; then he attempted to put his arm behind the cushions which supported her.

"Monsieur," said she, "it seems that you heard me, but that you did not understand me. No familiarity, I beg; let us each keep his place. It is certain that some day I will give you the right of calling me yours, but as yet you have not this right."

Ernauton arose, pale and vexed.

"Excuse me, madame," said he. "It seems that I act very foolishly; but this is very simple to understand. I am not yet acquainted with the customs of Paris. With us, in the provinces, two hundred leagues from here, when a woman says 'I love,' she loves and does not refuse herself. She does not make her words a pretext for humiliating a man at her feet. It is your custom as a Parisian, it is your right as a princess. I accept all that. But what can you expect? I am ignorant of the customs, but they will come to me."

The lady listened in silence. It was evident that she continued to observe Ernauton attentively, in order to discover if his vexation would end in real anger.

"Ah! ah! You are angry, I think," said she, proudly.

"Yes, I am angry, madame, but at myself, because I have for you, madame, not a passing fancy, but love, very sincere and very pure love. I do not seek your person, for if it were so, I should desire you, that is all; but I am trying to win your heart. Therefore I shall never forgive myself, madame, for having by my impertinence compromised the respect I owe you, a respect I will change to love, madame, only when you command me to do so. Only be glad, madame, that from this moment I await your orders."

"Come, come," said the lady, "let us not exaggerate things, Monsieur de Carmainges; here you are positively frozen after having been completely on fire."

"But it seems to me, madame" —

"Well, monsieur, never say to a woman that you will love her as you wish — that is tactless; show her that you will love her as she wishes, in good time!"

"That is what I said, madame."

"Yes, but you do not think it."

"I bow before your superiority, madame."

"A truce to politeness, it is repugnant to me to play the queen here. See, here is my hand, take it; it is that of a simple woman, only it is more feverish and more animated than yours."

Ernauton took the beautiful hand respectfully.

"Well!" said the duchess.

"Well?"

"You do not kiss it! are you mad? and have you sworn to put me in a rage?"

"But a moment ago" —

"A moment ago I snatched it from you, while now" —

"Now?"

"Well! now I give it to you."

Ernauton kissed the hand so obediently that she at once withdrew it.

"You readily see," said the young man, "another lesson!"

"I was wrong, then?"

"Surely, you make me go from one extreme to the other; fear will end by killing my passion; I shall continue to adore you, on my knees, it is true, but I shall have for you neither love nor confidence."

"Oh! I do not want that," said the lady in a playful tone, "for you would be a sorry lover, and I do not like my lovers to be so, I warn you. No, be natural, remain yourself, be Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges, and nothing else. I have my caprices. Well! my God! did you not tell me that I was beautiful? Every beautiful woman has her whims; respect them a great deal; oppose some of them; above all, do not fear me; and when I say to the too fiery Ernauton, 'Calm yourself,' let him consult my eyes, never my voice."

At these words she rose. It was time; the young man, carried away by his delirium, had seized her in his arms, and the mask of the duchess had brushed an instant against Ernauton's lips. It was then that she proved the deep truth of what she had said, for through the mask her eyes shot a glance as cold and white as the sinister forerunner of storms.

This glance so affected Carmainges that he dropped his arms and all his ardor died away.

"Well," said the duchess, "that is good, we shall see each other again. Really, you please me, Monsieur de Carmainges."

Ernauton bowed.

"When are you free?" she asked carelessly.

"Alas! Very seldom, madame," replied Ernauton.

"Ah! yes. I understand the service is fatiguing, is it not?"

"What service?"

"Why, the one you perform near the King. Do you not belong to the bodyguard of his Majesty?"

"That is to say, madame, I am one of a company of gentlemen."

"That is what I mean; and these gentlemen are Gascons, I believe?"

"Yes, all of us, madame."

"How many are there of you? I have been told, but I forget."

"Forty-five."

"What a singular number!"

"Nevertheless, so it is."

"Was it so arranged on purpose?"

"I think not; chance must be reponsible for the number."

"And these forty-five gentlemen do not leave the King, you say?"

"I did not say that we never left his Majesty, madame."

"Ah! pardon me, I thought I heard you say so. At least you said that you had but little liberty."

"That is true, I have but little liberty, madame, because during the day we are on duty to go out riding or hunting with his Majesty, and at night we are consigned to the Louvre."

"At night?"

"Yes."

"Every night?"

"Almost every night."

"In that case see what might have happened this evening if, for instance, this order had detained you! I would have waited for you, ignorant of the reason which prevented your coming, and should have supposed that my advances were scorned."

"Ah! madame, in order to see you I will now risk everything, I swear."

"That is useless and absurd, and I do not wish it."

"But what then?"

"Do your duty. It is for me to accommodate myself to it, for I am always free and mistress of my life."

"Oh! what kindness, madame!"

"But all this," continued the duchess, with her insinuating smile, "does not explain how you were free to-night, and how you managed to come."

"This evening, madame, I had already thought of asking permission of our captain, Monsieur de Loignac, who is well disposed towards me, when an order arrived to give the whole night to the Forty-Five."

"Ah! this order arrived?"

"Yes."

"And what was the cause of this good luck?"

"It is a reward, I believe, madame, for a rather tiresome service which we performed yesterday at Vincennes."

"Ah! very good," said the duchess.

"So, madame, it is to this circumstance that I owe the happiness of seeing you to-night, wholly at my ease."

"Well, listen, Carmainges," said the duchess, with a sweet familiarity which filled the heart of the young man with joy, "this is what you are to do: every time you think you are free, inform the hostess of this inn by note; every day a man will pass between her and me."

"Oh! my God! But it is too much kindness, madame."

The duchess laid her hand on Ernauton's arm.

"Listen," said she.

"What is it, madame?"

"That noise, whence does it come?"

In fact, the clanking of spurs, the sound of voices, the slamming of doors, and exclamations of joy rose from the room below, like the forerunner of an invasion.

Ernauton put his head outside the door that led to the antechamber.

"They are my companions," said he, "coming here to celebrate the holiday which Monsieur de Loignac has given them."

"But by what chance are they coming here to this inn in which we are?"

"Because it is precisely at *The Proud Chevalier*, madame, that the meeting was held on our arrival; because on that happy day of their entrance into the capital my companions grew fond of the wine and the pastry of Maître Fournichon, and some even of madame's towers."

"Oh!" said the duchess, with a malicious smile, "you speak very knowingly of these towers, monsieur."

"This is the first time, on my honor, that I have entered one of them, madame. But you, you who chose them?" he ventured to ask.

"You can easily understand why I chose the most lonely

place in Paris, a spot by the river, near the great wall, a place in which no one could recognize me or suspect I would come; but, my God! how noisy your companions are!" added the duchess.

In fact, the hubbub of the arrival had become an infernal hurricane; the noise of the exploits of the night before, bragging, the jingling of gold crowns and the clinking of glasses, foretold that the storm was in full blast.

Suddenly the sound of steps was heard on the small stairway which led to the tower, and the voice of Dame Fournichon cried from below:

"Monsieur de Sainte Maline! Monsieur de Sainte Maline!"

"Well?" replied the voice of the young man.

"Do not go up there, Monsieur de Sainte Maline, I beg you."

"Good! and why not, dear Dame Fournichon? Is not the whole house ours this evening?"

"The whole house, yes, but not the towers."

"Bah! The towers are a part of the house," cried five or six other voices, among which Ernauton recognized those of Perducas de Pincornay and Eustache de Miradoux.

"No, they are not," continued Dame Fournichon, "the towers are an exception, the towers belong to me; do not disturb my patrons."

"Madame Fournichon," said Sainte Maline, "I am your patron also, do not disturb me, then."

"Sainte Maline!" murmured Ernauton, anxiously, for he knew the evil tendencies and the audacity of the man.

"But, for pity's sake!" repeated Madame Fournichon.

"Madame Fournichon," said Sainte Maline, "it is midnight; at nine o'clock all the lights should be extinguished, but I see a light in your tower; only bad servants of the King transgress the edicts of the King; I wish to know who these bad servants are."

And Sainte Maline continued to advance, followed by several Gascons, whose footsteps clamped after his.

"My God!" cried the duchess, "my God, Monsieur de Carmainges, would those men dare to enter here?"

"In any case, madame, if they dare, I am here, and I can say to you in advance, madame, you need have no fear."

"Oh! but they are breaking down the doors, monsieur."

In fact, Sainte Maline, already too far advanced to retreat,

knocked so violently on the door that it broke in two; it was made of a kind of fir that Madame Fournichon had not thought necessary to test, in that her respect for love went as far as fanaticism.

CHAPTER LX.

HOW SAINTE MALINE ENTERED THE TOWER, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

Ernauton's first thought, when he saw the door of the antechamber broken in two by the blows of Sainte Maline, was to blow out the candle which lighted the tower.

However, this precaution, which was good though temporary, did not reassure the duchess, when suddenly Dame Fournichon, who had exhausted all her resources, resorted to a final means, and cried out:

"Monsieur de Sainte Maline, I warn you that the persons you are disturbing are your friends; necessity forces me to tell you this."

"Well! so much the more reason for us to present our compliments to them," said Perducas de Pincornay, in a thick voice, staggering behind Sainte Maline on the last step of the staircase.

"And who are these friends, let us see?" said Sainte Maline.

"Yes, let us see them, let us see them," cried Eustache de Miradoux.

The kind hostess, still hoping to prevent a meeting which, although honoring *The Proud Chevalier*, would do the greatest harm to the *Rose-tree of Love*, ascended to the crowded ranks of the gentlemen, and whispered the name of Ernauton into the ear of his aggressor.

"Ernauton!" repeated Sainte Maline, aloud, to whom this revelation was as oil on the fire instead of water, "Ernauton! it is not possible."

"And why not?" demanded Madame Fournichon.

"Yes, why not?" repeated several voices.

"Well, by Heaven!" cried Sainte Maline, "because Ernauton is a model of chastity, an example of continence, a compound of all the virtues. No, no, you are mistaken, Dame

Fournichon, it is not Monsieur de Carmainges who is locked in there."

And he approached the second door, in order to treat it as he had treated the first, when suddenly the door opened and Ernauton appeared on the threshold with a face which did not announce that patience was one of the virtues which, according to the words of Sainte Maline, he practised so religiously.

"By what right has Monsieur de Sainte Maline broken down the first door?" he demanded; "and having already broken down that, does he wish to demolish this too?"

"Well! It is really he, it is Ernauton!" cried Sainte Maline; "I recognize his voice, but as to himself, the devil take me if I could tell in the darkness what color he is."

"You do not reply to my question, monsieur," repeated Ernauton.

Sainte Maline laughed noisily, which reassured those of the Forty-Five who, with voices heavy with the threats they had just heard, had felt that it was prudent, at all hazards, to descend a few steps of the stairs.

"I am speaking to you, Monsieur de Sainte Maline do you hear me?" cried Ernauton.

"Yes, monsieur, perfectly," replied Sainte Maline.

"Well, what have you to say?"

"I have to say, my dear fellow, that we wanted to find out if it was you who occupied this inn of love."

"Well! now, monsieur, as you are able to satisfy yourself that it is I, since I am speaking to you, and since, if need be, I could touch you, leave me in peace."

"*Cap de Dieu!*" exclaimed Sainte Maline, "you are not a hermit, and you are not here alone, I suppose?"

"As to that, monsieur, you will allow me to leave you in doubt, supposing that you are in doubt."

"Ah, bah!" continued Sainte Maline, endeavoring to enter the tower, "could you really be alone? Ah! you are without light; bravo!"

"Come, gentlemen," said Ernauton, in a haughty tone, "I admit that you are drunk, and I forgive you; but there is a limit even to patience which we owe men who lack good sense; your jokes are exhausted, are they not? Do me the kindness, therefore, to retire."

Unfortunately Sainte Maline was in one of his moods of envious maliciousness.

"Oh, oh, retire!" said he; "how you say that, Monsieur Ernauton!"

"I said that in such a way that you could not be deceived as to my wish, Monsieur de Sainte Maline, and if necessary I will repeat it: retire, gentlemen, I beg you."

"Oh! not before you have allowed us the honor of saluting the lady for whom you have deserted our company."

At this insistence of Sainte Maline, the circle, which had been ready to break again, formed around him.

"Monsieur de Montcrabeau," said Sainte Maline, with authority, "go down and bring back a candle!"

"Monsieur de Montcrabeau," cried Ernauton, "if you do that, remember that you will offend me personally."

Montcrabeau hesitated, such a threat was in the young man's voice.

"Good!" replied Sainte Maline, "we have our oath, and Monsieur de Carmainges is so conscientious in discipline that he will not want to break it; we cannot draw swords against one another, so light up, Montcrabeau, light up."

Montcrabeau descended, and five minutes later came back with a candle which he handed to Sainte Maline.

"No, no," said the latter, "keep it; I shall perhaps need both my hands."

And Sainte Maline took a step forward to enter the tower.

"I call you to witness, all you who are here," said Ernauton, "that I am rudely insulted, and that violence is done me without cause, and that in consequence" (Ernauton quickly drew his sword) "and that in consequence I shall drive this sword into the breast of the first one who takes a step forward."

Sainte Maline, furious, also wished to seize his sword, but he had not drawn it half way from its sheath before he saw the sword of Ernauton shining at his breast.

Now, as he stepped forward, Sainte Maline felt the cold steel and sprang back in fury like a wounded bull, without Monsieur de Carmainges having had need to lunge or raise his arm. Then Ernauton went forward a step equal to the retreating one taken by Sainte Maline, and the sword hung threatening over the breast of the latter.

Sainte Maline turned pale; had Ernauton made a lunge, he would have nailed him to the wall.

He slowly returned his sword to his sheath.

"You deserve a thousand deaths for your insolence, mon-

sieur," said Ernauton, "but the oath you spoke of just now binds me, and I will not touch you further; leave me a free passage."

He stepped back to see if they would obey him.

And with a last gesture, which would have done honor to a king:

"You are at liberty, gentlemen," said he; "come, madame, I will answer for all."

Then they saw a woman appear on the threshold of the door, her head covered with a hood, her face hidden behind a veil, and who took Ernauton's arm, trembling from head to feet.

The young man replaced his sword in its sheath, and as though sure of having nothing further to fear, he proudly crossed the antechamber through the midst of his restless and curious companions.

Sainte Maline, whose breast had been grazed by the steel, had sprung back as far as the head of the stairs, choking from the merited affront which he had just received before his companions and the unknown lady.

He understood that every one would unite against him, jesters as well as serious-minded men, if affairs remained as they were between Ernauton and himself; this conviction drove him to resort to a last extremity.

He drew his dagger just as Carmainges passed in front of him.

Did he intend to kill Carmainges or did he merely intend to do what he did? It was impossible to know, without understanding the shadowy thoughts of the man, which perhaps in his fits of anger he himself could not read.

However, his arm fell upon the couple, and the blade of his dagger, instead of touching Ernauton's breast, cut the silk hood of the duchess, and snapped one of the strings of her mask. The latter fell to the floor.

Sainte Maline's movement had been so quick that in the darkness no one had been able to account for it and no one could prevent it.

The duchess gave a scream. Her mask fell from her, and along her neck she felt the rounded back of the blade, which, however, did not wound her.

While Ernauton was uneasy at the anxiety of the duchess, Sainte Maline had plenty of time to pick up the mask and return it to her, so that from the light of Montcrabeau's

candle he was able to see the uncovered face of the young woman.

"Ah! ah!" said he, in his jeering, insolent tone, "it is the beautiful lady of the litter; my congratulations, Ernauton, you go to work quickly."

Ernauton stopped and had already half drawn his sword from its sheath, which he was repenting of having put back, when the duchess pulled him down the steps, saying in a low tone:

"Come, come, I beg you, Monsieur de Carmainges."

"I will see you again, Monsieur de Sainte Maline," said Ernauton, moving off, "and rest assured, you shall pay me for this cowardly act as well as for the others."

"Good! good!" said Sainte Maline, "keep your own account, I will keep mine; some day we will settle both."

Carmainges heard, but did not even turn back; he was entirely taken up with the duchess. Arrived at the foot of the stairs, his passage was no longer obstructed; those of the Forty-Five who had not gone upstairs were below, no doubt blaming their companions for their violence. Ernauton led the duchess to her litter, which was guarded by two servants.

Having reached that, and feeling herself safe, the duchess pressed the hand of Carmainges and said to him:

"Monsieur Ernauton, after what has taken place, after the insult from which, in spite of your bravery, you could not save me, and which will not fail to be renewed, we cannot return here; look about, I beg you, for some house in the vicinity which is for sale or to let; and rest assured, before long you will hear from me."

"Must I take leave of you, madame?" said Ernauton, bowing in obedience to the orders which had just been given him, and which were too flattering to his pride for him to discuss them.

"Not yet, Monsieur de Carmainges, not yet; follow my litter to the new bridge, so that the wretch who recognized me as the lady of the litter, but who does not really know who I am, may not follow us and discover my house."

Ernauton obeyed, but no one watched them.

Having reached the Pont Neuf, which at that time deserved this name, since it was scarcely seven years since the architect Ducerceau had thrown it across the Seine,— having reached the Pont Neuf, the duchess raised her hand to Ernauton's lips, saying:

"Go now, monsieur."

"May I venture to ask when I shall see you again, madame?"

"That depends upon your haste in carrying out my commission, and this haste will prove to me how great or how small is your desire to see me again."

"Oh, madame, in that case, you may depend on me."

"That is well. Go now, my cavalier."

And the duchess a second time gave her hand to Ernauton, who kissed it and departed.

"It is strange, truly," said the young man as he retraced his steps, "this woman has a liking for me, I am sure, yet she is not in the least concerned whether or not I am killed by that assassin of a Sainte Maline."

And a slight shrug of the shoulders proved that the young man gave this indifference its proper value.

Then returning to the first thought, which contained nothing flattering to his pride:

"Oh!" he continued, "the fact is she was greatly troubled, poor woman, for the fear of being compromised is with princesses especially the strongest of all thoughts. Because," he added, smiling to himself, "she is a princess."

And as this last thought was most flattering to him, it was this that absorbed him.

But this knowledge could not make Carmainges lose the remembrance of the insult which had been given him; therefore he returned straight to the inn, so that no one might suppose that he was afraid of the possible consequences of the affair.

He naturally determined to infringe all orders and break all possible oaths, and to finish with Sainte Maline at the first word he spoke or the first gesture he allowed himself to make.

Love and pride, wounded by the same blow, roused an intrepid fury, which in his present state of exaltation would surely have made him fight ten men.

This resolution shone in his eyes when he reached the threshold of the inn of *The Proud Chevalier*.

Madame Fournichon, who was anxiously awaiting his return, stood trembling on the threshold.

At sight of Ernauton she wiped her eyes as though she had been crying a great deal, and throwing her arms around the young man's neck she begged his pardon in spite of all the

efforts of her husband, who claimed that not being in the wrong his wife had no pardon to ask.

The good hostess was not disagreeable enough for Carmainges, even had he complained of her, to continue vexed with her; he therefore assured Dame Fournichon that he felt not the slightest anger towards her, and that her wine alone was to blame.

This was an idea which the husband could comprehend, and for which he thanked Ernauton by a nod of the head.

While these things were taking place at the door every one was at table warmly discussing the event which, beyond dispute, was the culminating point of the evening.

Many blamed Sainte Maline, with the frankness which is the chief characteristic of Gascons when talking among themselves.

Several, seeing the frowning brow of their companion and his lip contracted by deep thought, abstained from expressing an opinion.

For the rest, they attacked the supper of Maître Fournichon with no less enthusiasm, but they philosophized while they attacked it, that was all.

"As to me," said Monsieur Hector de Brian, aloud, "I know that Monsieur de Sainte Maline is in the wrong, and that if for an instant my name had been Ernauton de Carmainges, Monsieur de Sainte Maline would now be lying under this table instead of sitting before it."

Sainte Maline raised his head and looked at Hector de Brian.

"I say what I mean," replied the latter; "and see, there on the threshold is some one who seems to be of my opinion."

All eyes were turned in the direction indicated by the young man, and they saw Carmainges, with pale face, standing in the frame formed by the doorway. At sight of him, who seemed an apparition, each felt a shiver run through his whole body.

Ernauton descended from the threshold as the statue of a commander would have stepped down from his pedestal, and walked straight to Sainte Maline, without real provocation, but with a determination which caused more than one heart to beat.

Thereupon, from all sides, they cried out to Monsieur de Carmainges:

"Come here, Ernauton; come over here, Carmainges, here is a seat near me."

"Thanks," replied the young man; "but it is next to Monsieur de Sainte Maline that I wish to sit."

Sainte Maline rose; every eye was on him.

But, as he rose, his face completely changed in expression.

"I will give you the seat you desire, monsieur," said he, without anger; "and in giving it to you I will offer you very frank and very sincere apologies for my stupid attack of a while ago; I was drunk. You said so yourself; forgive me."

This declaration, made in the midst of the general silence, did not satisfy Ernauton, although it was evident that not a syllable had been lost by the forty-three guests, who were anxiously watching for the end of the scene.

But at the last words of Sainte Maline, the shouts of joy from his companions showed to Ernauton that he must appear satisfied, and that he was fully avenged.

His good sense therefore forced him to keep silent.

At the same time a glance given by him to Sainte Maline showed the latter that he should mistrust him more than ever.

"This villain is brave, however," said Ernauton to himself in a low tone, "and if he yields now it is because of some evil idea which pleases him more."

Sainte Maline's glass was full; he filled Ernauton's.

"Come! come! Peace! peace!" cried all the voices. "To the reconciliation of Carmainges and Sainte Maline."

Carmainges took advantage of the clinking of the glasses and the sound of all the voices, and leaning towards Sainte Maline with a smile on his lips, so that no one might suspect the purport of the words which he addressed to him.

"Monsieur de Sainte Maline," said he, "this is the second time you have insulted me without giving me satisfaction. Take care; at the third offence I will kill you like a dog."

"Do so, monsieur, if you think you should," replied Sainte Maline; "for on my honor as a gentleman, in your place I would do as much."

And the two mortal enemies touched their glasses, as the best of friends would have done.

CHAPTER LXI.

WHAT TOOK PLACE IN THE MYSTERIOUS HOUSE.

While the inn of *The Proud Chevalier*, apparently a place of the most perfect concord, with closed doors but open cellars, was giving out through the chinks of its shutters the light of the candles and the happiness of its guests, an unusual event was taking place in the mysterious house of which our readers have seen only the outside as described in the pages of this story.

The servant with the bald head had come and gone from one room to another, carrying here and there articles which he wrapped up and packed away in a travelling box.

These first preparations completed, he loaded a pistol and placed a large dagger in its velvet sheath; then by means of a ring, he hung it to the chain which served him as a belt; to the latter he also attached his pistol, a bunch of keys, and a prayer-book bound in black shagreen.

While he was thus occupied, a light step like that of a shadow touched the floor of the first story and glided down the stairs.

Suddenly a woman, pale and looking like a spirit under the folds of her white veil, appeared on the threshold of the door, and a voice as gentle and sad as the song of a bird in the depths of a forest was heard.

"Rémy," said this voice, "are you ready?"

"Yes, madame, and I am now waiting only to add your box to mine."

"Do you think these boxes can be easily packed on our horses?"

"I will answer for it, madame; besides, if it gives you the least trouble, we can give up carrying mine; have I not everything in that one which I need?"

"No, Rémy, no; on no account am I willing that you should lack for the necessaries on the journey; and then, once there, the poor old man being ill, all the servants will be occupied with him. Oh! Rémy, I am in haste to reach my father; I have gloomy presentiments, and it seems to me a century since I saw him."

"And yet, madame," said Rémy, "you left him only three

months ago, and the interval is no longer between this journey and the last than between the others."

"Rémy, you are such a good physician, did you yourself not admit, on leaving my father the last time, that he had not long to live?"

"Yes, no doubt; but it was an expressed fear, and not a fulfilled prediction. God sometimes forgets old men, and, strange to say, they live from a habit of living; more than that, even: sometimes an old man is like a child, ill to-day, well to-morrow."

"Alas, Rémy, and like the child too, the old man well to-day, to-morrow is dead."

Rémy did not answer, for no encouraging reply could really come from his lips. For a few minutes a gloomy silence succeeded the conversation we have just narrated.

Each of the two speakers remained sad and thoughtful.

"At what hour did you order the horses, Rémy?" the mysterious lady asked at last.

"At two o'clock in the morning."

"One o'clock has just struck."

"Yes, madame."

"No one is watching outside, Rémy?"

"No one."

"Not even that wretched young man?"

"Not even he!"

Rémy sighed.

"You tell me that in a strange tone, Rémy."

"It is because the young man has made a resolution."

"What?" asked the lady, with a start.

"Not to see us any more, or at least not to try to see us any more."

"And where is he going?"

"Whither we are all going; to rest."

"God give him eternal rest!" replied the lady, in a voice as cold and mournful as a death knell, "and yet" —

She paused.

"And yet?" said Rémy.

"Had he nothing to do in this world?"

"He would have loved, had he been loved in return."

"A man of his name, rank, and age ought to think of the future."

"Do you think of it, madame, you who are of an age, rank, and name which his might envy?"

The eyes of the lady shot forth a sinister glance.

"Yes, Rémy," said she, "I think of it, since I live; but listen" —

She bent her head.

"Do I not hear the trot of a horse?"

"Yes, it seems so to me."

"Could it be our guide already?"

"Possibly; but in that case he will be an hour ahead of the appointed time."

"Some one is stopping at the door, Rémy."

"Yes."

Rémy hastily went down, and reached the foot of the stairs just as three rapid knocks were given on the door.

"Who is it?" asked Rémy.

"I," replied a trembling, broken voice, "I, Grandchamp, the valet of the baron."

"Ah! my God! you, Grandchamp, you in Paris! Wait until I open the door for you; but speak softly."

He opened the door.

"Whence do you come?" asked Rémy, in a low tone.

"From Méridor."

"From Méridor?"

"Yes, dear Monsieur Rémy, — alas!"

"Come in, come in quickly. My God!"

"Well, Rémy," asked the lady's voice from the top of the stairs, "are they our horses?"

"No, no, madame."

Then returning to the old man:

"What is the matter, my good Grandchamp?"

"You do not guess?" replied the servant.

"Alas! yes, I guess; but in Heaven's name do not tell her this news suddenly. Oh! what will she say, poor lady?"

"Rémy, Rémy," said the voice, "you are speaking with some one, it seems to me."

"Yes, madame, yes."

"With some one whose voice I recognize."

"Indeed, madame — How shall I tell it, Grandchamp? — here she is!"

The lady, who had descended from the first floor to the one below, as she had already descended from the second to the first, appeared at the end of the corridor.

"Who is here?" she asked; "I should say it was Grandchamp."

"Yes, madame, it is I," replied the old man, humbly and sadly, uncovering his white head.

"You, Grandchamp! Oh, my God! my presentiments were not wrong, my father is dead!"

"It is true, madame," replied Grandchamp, forgetting every warning of Rémy, "it is true, Méridor no longer has a master."

Pale, icy, but motionless and firm, the lady bore the blow without flinching.

Rémy, seeing her so resigned and so sad, went to her and gently took her hand.

"How did he die?" asked the lady. "Tell me, my friend?"

"Madame, Monsieur le Baron, who no longer left his armchair, had a third stroke of apoplexy a week ago. He was able to stammer your name a last time, then he ceased speaking, and died during the night."

Diana made a gesture of thanks to the aged servant, then without another word she went upstairs to her room.

"At last she is free," murmured Rémy, more gloomy and more pale than the lady herself.

"Come Grandchamp, come."

The lady's apartment was on the first floor, behind a small room which fronted the street, while the apartment itself obtained its only light from a small window overlooking the court.

The furniture of the room was sombre but rich. The hangings were of Arras tapestry, the most beautiful tapestry made at that time, and represented various subjects of the Passion.

A *prie-dieu* of sculptured oak, a stall of the same wood and workmanship, a bed with twisted posts having curtains similar to the tapestry on the walls, and a carpet from Bruges; these were the only ornaments of the chamber.

Not a flower, not a jewel, not a touch of gilding; wood and bronze everywhere took the place of silver and gold. A frame of black wood containing the portrait of a man hung on the front wall, upon which fell the light from the window, evidently made for that purpose.

It was before this portrait that the lady knelt with swelling heart but dry eyes.

IT WAS BEFORE THIS PORTRAIT THAT THE LADY KNELT WITH SWELLING HEART.

She fixed on the inanimate face a long and indescribable look of love, as if the noble image was about to come to life and answer her.

A noble face, indeed, and the epithet seemed made for it. The painter had represented a young man of twenty-eight or thirty, lying half dressed on a couch; from his half open breast a few drops of blood still fell; his right hand hung down, mutilated, yet it still held a broken piece of a sword.

His eyes were closed like those of a man about to die; pallor and suffering gave to his face a divine look which the face of man does not begin to assume until the moment when he is leaving life for eternity.

The only words, the only device, could be read under the portrait in letters as red as blood:

Aut Cæsar aut nihil.

The lady extended her arms toward the picture. and invoked it as she might have done a god:

"I begged you to wait, although your irritated soul must have been thirsty for revenge," said she, "and as the dead see everything, you must have seen that I have lived only in order to keep from becoming a parricide; you dead, I too should have died; but by dying I should have killed my father. And then, you know that on your bloody corpse I made a vow; I swore to pay death with death, blood with blood; but in that case I should have burdened with a crime the white head of the true old man who called me his innocent child.

"You have waited; thank you, my well-beloved; you have waited, and now I am free; the last link which chained me to earth has just been broken by the Lord; to the Lord let thanks be given. I am wholly yours; no more hiding, no more ambush. I can act openly, for now as I no longer will leave any one behind me on the earth, I have the right to leave it."

She rose on one knee and kissed the hand, which seemed to hang outside of the frame.

"You will forgive me, my friend," said she, "for having dry eyes; it is from having wept at your tomb that my eyes have become so, these eyes you loved so well. In a few months I shall rejoin you, and you will answer me at last, dear shade, to whom I have spoken so much without ever receiving a reply."

At these words, Diana rose respectfully as if she had finished talking with God and sat down on her oak stall.

"Poor father!" she murmured, in a cold tone and with an expression which seemed to belong to no other human being.

Then she fell into a sombre reverie which apparently made her forget her present trouble as well as her past. Suddenly she rose, her hand resting on the arm of the chair.

"That is it," said she, "and in that way everything will be better. Rémy."

The faithful servant no doubt was listening at the door, for he appeared at once.

"Here I am, madame," he replied.

"My worthy friend, my brother," said Diana, "you, the only one in the world who understands me, bid me farewell."

"Why, madame?"

"Because the time has come for us to part, Rémy."

"For us to part!" exclaimed the young man, in a tone which made his companion start. "What are you saying, madame?"

"Yes, Rémy. This scheme of revenge seemed to me noble and pure so long as there was an obstacle between him and me, so long as I saw it only in the distance; so are the things of this world great and beautiful from afar. Now that I am near to the execution of our plan, now that the obstacle has disappeared, I do not recoil, Rémy; but I do not want to drag after me along the road of crime a generous and spotless soul, so you will leave me, my friend. All this life spent in tears will count for me as an expiation before God and before you, and it will also count with you, I trust; and you who have never done and who never will do any wrong, you will be doubly sure of Heaven."

Rémy listened to the words of the lady of Monsoreau with a gloomy, almost haughty air.

"Madame," he replied, "do you think you are speaking to an old man trembling and worn out from the abuse of life? Madame, I am twenty-six years old. I have all the vigor of youth, which seems dried up in me. A corpse snatched from the tomb, if I still live it is in order to accomplish a terrible deed, it is in order to take an active part in the work of Providence. Never separate my thought from yours, then, madame, since these two sinister thoughts have so long dwelt under the same roof; where you go, I will go; what you do, I will help;

unless, madame, and in spite of my prayers, you persist in this determination to drive" —

"Oh!" murmured the young woman, "drive you away! What words are you using, Rémy?"

"If you persist in this resolution," continued the young man, as if she had not spoken, "I know what I shall do; and all our studies, become useless, shall end for me in two thrusts of my dagger: one which I shall give to the heart of the one you know, the other to my own."

"Rémy, Rémy!" cried Diana, taking a step towards the young man and raising her hand imperatively above her head, "Rémy, do not say that. The life of the one you threaten does not belong to you, it is mine; I have paid dearly enough for it to take it myself when the moment comes for him to lose it. You know what has happened, Rémy, and it is not a dream. I swear to you, the day when I knelt before the already cold body of him," — and she pointed to the portrait, — "that day, I say, I laid my lips on the lips of the wound you see open, and those lips trembled and said to me:

"'Avenge me, Diana, avenge me!'"

"Madame!"

"Rémy, I repeat that it was not an illusion, it was not a fancy of my delirium; the wound spoke, it spoke, I tell you, and I still hear it whispering: 'Avenge me, Diana, avenge me!'"

The servant lowered his head.

"Therefore the vengeance is for me and not for you," continued Diana; "besides, for whom and by whom did he die? For me and by me."

"I ought to obey you, madame," replied Rémy, "for I was as dead as he. Who had me carried away from the midst of the corpses with which that room was filled? you. Who cured me of my wounds? you. Who hid me? you, you; that is, the half of the soul of the one for which I had so gladly died; command, therefore, I will obey, provided that you do not order me to leave you."

"Very well, Rémy, follow my fortune, then; you are right. Nothing ought to separate us."

Rémy pointed to the portrait.

"Now, madame," said he with energy, "he was killed by treason, by treason should he be avenged. Ah! you do not know one thing; you are right, the hand of God is with us;

you do not know that, that night, I found the secret of the *aqua tofana*, the poison of the Médicis, the poison of René the Florentine."

"Ah! you are speaking the truth?"

"Come and see, madame, come and see."

"But Grandchamp is waiting; what will he say at not seeing us come back again, at not hearing us any more? for it is downstairs, is it not, that you wish to take me?"

"The poor old man has ridden sixty miles, madame; he is worn out and has gone to sleep on my bed. Come."

Diana followed Rémy.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE LABORATORY.

Rémy led the unknown lady into the next room, and pushing a spring hidden under a plank of the floor, he brought to light a trap-door which slid from the centre of the room to the wall.

On opening, this trap-door showed a stairway, dark, steep, and narrow. Rémy went down first and held out his hand to Diana, who leaned on it and descended behind him. Twenty steps of this stairway, or rather of this ladder, led to a circular cave, black and damp, the entire furniture of which was a furnace with its immense oven, a square table, two rush chairs, and a quantity of vials and iron boxes.

The only inmates were a half-dead goat and some birds without voices, which looked in this dark underground place like the spectres of the animals which they resembled, and not the animals themselves.

In the furnace the remains of a fire were dying out, while a thick black smoke was silently escaping by a pipe in the wall.

An alembic placed in the oven filtered slowly, drop by drop, a liquid as yellow as gold. These drops fell into a vial of white glass, two fingers thick, but at the same time perfectly transparent and closed by the tube of the alembic, which communicated with it.

Diana descended and stopped, without surprise and without fear, in the midst of all these objects of strange form and

existence; one would have said that the ordinary emotions of life made no further impressions on this woman who already lived outside of life. Rémy signed to her to stop at the foot of the stairway; she did so.

The young man lighted a lamp, which threw a livid glare on the objects we have just described, and which up to that time had slept or moved in darkness.

Then he approached a well dug in the cave near the wall, and which had neither parapet nor margin, attached a bucket by a long rope, and without a pulley let the rope down into the water, which was sleeping gloomily at the bottom of the funnel, and which gave out a splashing sound. Then he drew up the bucket filled with water as cool and fresh as crystal.

"Come here, madame," said Rémy.

Diana approached.

Rémy poured a single drop of the liquid contained in the glass vial into the enormous quantity of water, and the entire mass instantly became tinged with yellow; then this color evaporated, and at the end of ten minutes the water had become as transparent as before. The fixity of Diana's gaze alone gave an idea of the close attention with which she watched the operation. Rémy looked at her.

"Well?" said she.

"Well," said Rémy, "now into this water, which has neither taste nor color, dip a flower, a glove, or a handkerchief; mix with this water some scented soap, pour it into the basin used for washing the teeth, hands, and face, and you will see, as they formerly saw at the court of King Charles IV., the flower suffocated by its own perfume, the glove poisoned by contact, the soap killed by its introduction into the pores. Pour a single drop of this pure oil on the wick of a candle or a lamp — the cotton will become saturated and for one hour the candle or the lamp will exhale death, and burn afterwards as innocently as any other lamp or candle."

"You are sure of what you say about this, Rémy?" asked Diana.

"I have made all these experiments, madame; see these birds which cannot sleep, and which want nothing more to eat; they have drunk water similar to this water. See this goat, which has browsed on grass sprinkled with this same water. It bleats, and its eyes vacillate; it would be in vain for us to give it back liberty, light, or nature now; its life is condemned;

at least this nature to which we might return it instinctively reveals some of the counter-poisons which animals divine, and of which men are ignorant."

"May I see the vial, Rémy?" asked Diana.

"Yes, madame, for all of the liquid is precipitated by this time; but wait."

With infinite precaution, Rémy separated it from the alembic; then he corked it up with a plug of soft wax, which he flattened over the mouth of the opening, and, covering this opening with a piece of wool, he handed the vial to his companion.

Diana took it without any emotion, raised it on a level with the lamp, and having for some moments gazed at the thick liquid which it contained:

"It will do," said she; "we will choose, when the time comes, either a flower, a pair of gloves, a lamp, a piece of soap, or a basin. Does the liquid keep in metal?"

"It corrodes it."

"But this flask may possibly break."

"I think not; see the thickness of the crystal; besides, we can enclose it or rather encase it in a gold wrapper."

"So, Rémy," continued the lady, "you are content, are you not?"

And something like a pale smile touched the lips of the lady and gave them that reflection of life which a moonbeam throws on benumbed objects.

"More than ever, madame," replied the man; "to punish the wicked is to enjoy the holy prerogative of God."

"Listen, Rémy, listen!"

And the lady bent her head.

"Did you hear a noise?"

"The stamping of horses in the street, it seems to me; Rémy, our horses have arrived."

"Probably, madame, for it is almost time; but I will send them back."

"Why?"

"Are they not useless now?"

"Instead of going to Méridor, Rémy, we will go to Flanders; keep the horses."

"Ah! I understand."

And the eyes of the servant in turn gave out a gleam of joy which could be compared only to Diana's smile.

"But Grandchamp," he added, "what shall we do with him?"

"Grandchamp needs to rest, as I told you. He shall remain in Paris and sell this house, which we no longer need. But you must give back liberty to all these poor innocent animals which we have been obliged to make suffer. You said that God would perhaps provide for their safety."

"But all these furnaces, these retorts, these alembics?"

"Since they were here when we bought the house, what matters it if others find them here after we leave?"

"But the powder, the acids, the essences."

"Burn them, Rémy, burn them!"

"Then step back."

"I?"

"Yes, and at least put on this glass mask."

Rémy handed Diana a mask, which she held before her face. Then, covering his own mouth and nose with a large piece of wool, he pressed the cord of the bellows, brightened the flame of the charcoal; and when the fire was well kindled, he poured into it the powders, which burst into joyous crackling, some throwing out green flames, others volatilizing in sparks as pale as sulphur, and the essences, which, instead of extinguishing the flame, rose like fiery serpents in the pipe, with rumblings like those of distant thunder. At length, when everything was consumed:

"You are right, madame," said Rémy, "if any one should now discover the secret of this cellar, he would think that a chemist had lived in it. They still burn sorcerers nowadays, but they respect chemists."

"And besides," said the lady, "if they burn us, Rémy, it would be justice, it seems to me; are we not poisoners? and provided that I have accomplished my task the day when I mount my funeral pyre, I shall be repelled no more by that kind of death than by any other; the most of the ancient martyrs died in such a way."

Rémy made a gesture of assent, and taking his vial from the hands of his mistress, he wrapped it up carefully. Just then there came a knock at the street door.

"It is your servants, madame; you were not mistaken. Quick, go up and answer while I close the trap."

The lady obeyed. The same thought so lived in these two minds that it would have been difficult to say which one bent to the will of the other.

Rémy ascended behind Diana, touched the spring, and the cave was closed. Diana found Grandchamp at the door. Awakened by the noise, he had come to open it. The old man was greatly surprised when he heard of the approaching departure of his mistress, who told him of the journey without saying where she was going.

"Grandchamp, my friend," said she, "Rémy and I are going on a journey we planned a long time ago; you will speak of it to no one, and you will reveal my name to no one, whoever he may be."

"Oh! I promise you, madame," said the aged servant. "But we shall see you again?"

"Without doubt, Grandchamp, without doubt; do we not always see our friends again, if not in this world, at least in the next? But by the way, Grandchamp, this house has become useless to us."

Diana drew a file of papers from a chest of drawers.

"These are the letters which prove the ownership; you will rent or sell the house. If one month from now you have found neither tenant nor buyer, you will simply leave it and return to Méridor."

"And if I find a buyer, madame, for how much shall I sell it?"

"For as much as you please."

"And I am to take the money to Méridor?"

"You will keep it for yourself, my aged Grandchamp."

"What, madame, such a sum?"

"Certainly. Do I not give it to you for your kind services, Grandchamp? and then, besides my debts to you, have I not those of my father to pay also?"

"But, madame, without contract and power of attorney I can do nothing."

"He is right," said Rémy.

"Find some way," said Diana.

"Nothing is simpler. This house was bought in my name; I will sell it to Grandchamp, who in this way will be able to sell it, himself, to whomsoever he pleases."

"Make it over to me."

Rémy took a pen and wrote his deed of gift below the contract of sale.

"Now, adieu," said the lady of Monsoreau to Grandchamp, who was greatly affected at remaining alone in the house,

"adieu, Grandchamp; have the horses brought to the door while I finish my packing."

Diana ascended to her own room, cut out with a dagger the canvas of the portrait, rolled it, covered it with a piece of silk, and placed it in the travelling-box. The frame, left empty, yawned and seemed to tell more eloquently than ever before all the griefs it had heard. The rest of the chamber, now that the portrait had been removed, had no longer any individuality and became an ordinary room.

When Rémy had strapped the two boxes with rope, he gave a last glance into the street to assure himself that no one had stopped there except the guide; then, aiding his pale mistress to mount her horse:

"I think, madame," said he in a low tone, "that this house will be the last in which we shall stay for so long."

"The next to the last, Rémy," said the lady, in her grave, monotonous voice.

"What will the other one be?"

"The tomb, Rémy."

CHAPTER LXIII.

WHAT MONSEIGNEUR FRANCIS OF FRANCE, THE DUC D'ANJOU, AND DE BRABANT, COUNT OF FLANDERS, WERE DOING.

Our readers will now permit us to leave the King at the Louvre, Henry of Navarre at Cahors, Chicot on the highway, and the lady of Monsoreau in the street, and turn to Flanders to Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou, recently appointed Duke of Brabant, in whose aid we have seen the Grand Admiral of France, Anne Daigues, Duc de Joyeuse, advancing.

Eighty leagues from Paris, towards the north, the sound of French voices and the flag of France were floating over a French camp on the banks of the Scheldt. It was night; some fires disposed in an immense circle along the bank of the river, which was very wide in front of Antwerp, were reflected in its deep waters. The customary solitude of the polders and the sombre verdure was broken by the neighing of French horses. From the height of the city ramparts the sentinels saw shining in the fire of the bivouacs the gun of the French sentinels, a fleeting and distant gleam, which the width of the

river, lying between the army and the city, rendered as inoffensive as heat-lightning shining on the horizon on a clear summer night. The army was that of the Duc d'Anjou. We must tell our readers what it was going to do there. Perhaps it will not be interesting, but they will forgive us, in consideration of the caution; so many are wearied without having been warned!

Those of our readers who have been willing to turn over the pages of *Queen Marguerite of Valois* and *The Lady of Monsoreau* are already acquainted with Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou, that jealous, egotistical, ambitious, and impatient prince, who, born so near the throne, to which each event seemed to draw him nearer, had never been able to wait with patience until death should clear the way. So at first he had coveted the throne of Navarre under Charles IX., then that of Charles IX. himself, and finally that of France, occupied by his brother Henry, ex-King of Poland, who had worn two crowns, to the jealousy of his brother, who had never been able to secure one.

For a time he had turned his eyes towards England, governed by a woman, and in order to have the throne he had asked the woman in marriage, although she was called Elizabeth and was twenty years older than he.

At this point fate had begun to smile on him, if it would have been a smile of fate to marry the proud daughter of Henry VIII. He who all his life in his forward desires had not been able to succeed even in defending his liberty; who had seen killed, perhaps even had killed, his favorites, La Mole and Coconnas, and basely sacrificed Bussy, the bravest of his gentlemen, — the whole without advantage to his elevation and with great damage to his fame, — this man, repudiated by fortune, suddenly saw himself overwhelmed with the favors of a powerful queen, inaccessible up to then to any mortal glance, and raised by a whole people to the highest dignity which this people could confer. The inhabitants of Flanders offered him a crown and Elizabeth gave him her ring.

We do not pretend to be an historian; if occasionally we become one, it is when history chances to descend to the level of romance, or better yet, when romance rises to the height of history; it is then that we plunge our inquisitive glances into the princely existence of the Duc d'Anjou, an existence which, always side by side with the illustrious path of royalty, is full

of those events, sometimes sombre, sometimes brilliant, which are usually noticed only in the lives of kings.

Let us, therefore, in a few words trace the history of his life. He had seen his brother, Henry III., involved in a quarrel with the De Guises, and he had allied himself to the De Guises; but he soon perceived that the latter had no real aim except that of substituting themselves for the Valois on the throne of France. Thereupon he separated from the De Guises; but, as we have seen, this separation took place not without some danger, and Salcède, executed on the Grève, had proved the importance which the susceptibility of Messieurs de Lorraine had attached to the friendship of Monsieur d'Anjou. Moreover, a long time before, Henry III. had opened his eyes, and one year previous to the beginning of this story the Duc d'Alençon, exiled or almost so, had retired to Amboise. It is then that the Flemish had opened their arms to him. Wearied by the Spanish domination, decimated by the proconsulship of the Duc d'Alba, deceived by the false peace of Don Juan of Austria, who had taken advantage of this peace to retake Namier and Charlemont, the Flemish had called William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, to them and had made him governor-general of Brabant.

One word about this new personage, who has held such an important place in history, but who will appear but seldom in our story.

William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, was at that time fifty or fifty-one years of age; son of William of Nassau, called the Old, and of Julienne of Stolberg, cousin of that René of Nassau killed at the siege of Saint Dizier, he had inherited his title of Prince of Orange, and while still young had been brought up in the severest principles of the Reformation. He had, we say, while still young, realized his strength and measured the importance of his mission. This mission, which he believed he had received from Heaven, to which he was true all his life, and for which he died the death of a martyr, was to establish the Republic of Holland, which as a matter of fact he founded. When a young man he had been summoned by Charles V. to his court. Charles V. was a judge of men; he had weighed William, and the old emperor, who at that time was holding in his hand the heaviest burden that an imperial hand had ever carried, frequently consulted the lad on the most delicate political matters regarding the Nether-

lands. Furthermore, the young man was scarcely twenty-four years of age when Charles V., in the absence of the famous Philibert Emmanuel of Savoy, entrusted to him the command of the army of Flanders. William proved himself worthy of this high esteem: he held in check the Duke of Nevers and Coligny, two of the greatest captains of the time, and before their eyes he fortified Philippeville and Charlemont; the day on which Charles V. abdicated, it was on William of Nassau that he leaned, to descend the steps of the throne, and it was he whom he charged to carry to Ferdinand the imperial crown which Charles V. had just resigned voluntarily.

Then came Philip II., and in spite of the command of Charles V. to his son to look on William as a brother, the latter soon felt that Philip II. was one of those princes who do not care to have relatives. So he now shut up in his own mind his great project to free Holland and emancipate Flanders, which perhaps would have lain dormant in his mind forever if the old Emperor, his friend and his father, had not had the strange idea of substituting a monk's gown for the royal mantle. Then the Low Countries, at the suggestion of William, demanded the recall of the foreign troops; then began that frightful struggle of Spain to retain the prey which was escaping her; then there passed over to that unhappy people, always bruised between France and the Empire, the vice-royalty of Marguerite of Austria, and the bloody proconsulship of the Duc d'Alba; then was organized that contest at once political and religious, the pretext for which was the protest of the Hôtel de Culembourg, which demanded the abolition of the Inquisition in the Netherlands; then advanced that procession of four hundred gentlemen clothed with the greatest simplicity, walking two by two, and bringing to the foot of the throne of the vice-governor the expression of the general wish, set forth in this protest; then, at sight of those men so earnest and so plainly dressed, there escaped from Barlaimont, one of the councillors of the duchess, that word "*gueux*" (beggars), which, taken up and accepted by the Flemish, designated thenceforth in the Netherlands the patriotic party, until then without a name.

From this moment William began to play the part which made him one of the greatest political actors the world has ever had. Repeatedly overthrown in the struggle against the crushing power of Philip II., he arose repeatedly, always

stronger after his defeats, always raising a new army to replace the army which had been scattered, routed, or annihilated. He reappeared stronger than before his defeat, and was always hailed as a liberator.

It was in the midst of these alternatives of moral triumphs and physical defeats, if we may so express it, that William learned at Mons the news of the massacre of Saint Bartholomew.

This was a terrible blow, which almost touched the heart of the Netherlands. By this wound Holland, and that portion of Flanders which was Calvinistic, lost the bravest blood of their natural allies, the Huguenots of France.

William replied to this news at first by a retreat, as was his custom. From Mons, where he was, he withdrew to the Rhine, and waited.

Events rarely injure a worthy cause.

News which it was impossible to expect was at once circulated. Certain sea beggars — there were sea beggars as well as land beggars — certain sea beggars, driven by an ill wind into the port of Brille, seeing that they could in no way regain the open sea, let themselves drift, and, compelled by despair, they took the town which already had prepared gibbets on which to hang them. The city captured, they drove the Spanish garrison from the neighborhood, and not finding among them a man strong enough to utilize the success they owed to chance, they called on the Prince of Orange. William hastened to them ; it was necessary to strike a great blow ; it was necessary, by involving all Holland, to render a reconciliation with Spain forever impossible.

William issued an order which proscribed the Catholic religion in Holland as the Protestant religion was proscribed in France.

At this manifesto the war began anew : the Duc d'Alba sent against the rebels his own son, Frederic of Toledo, who captured Zutphen, Nardem, and Haarlem ; but this check, far from crushing the Dutch, seemed to give them new strength. Every one rose ; all took up arms, from the Zuyder Zee to the Scheldt. For an instant Spain was frightened, recalled the Duc d'Alba, and sent as his successor Don Louis of Requesens, one of the conquerors of Lepanto. Then began a new series of misfortunes for William : Ludovic and Henry of Nassau, who were bringing aid to the Prince of Orange, were surprised by

one of the lieutenants of Don Louis, near Nimeguen, defeated, and killed; the Spaniards penetrated into Holland, laid siege to Leyden, and sacked Antwerp. All were in despair, when Providence a second time came to the aid of the rising republic. Requesens died at Brussels. Then all the provinces, united by a single interest, drew up with one accord and signed, on the eighth of November, 1576, — that is to say, four days after the sack of Antwerp, — the treaty known as the Peace of Ghent. By this they pledged themselves to aid one another in delivering their country from the yoke of the Spaniards *and of other foreigners*. Don Juan reappeared and with him the ill fortune of the Low Countries. In less than two months Namur and Charlemont were taken.

The Flemish responded to these two blows by appointing the Prince of Orange governor-general of Brabant. Don Juan died in turn. Evidently God was deciding in favor of the freedom of the Low Countries.

Don Juan was succeeded by Alexander Farnese. The latter was a clever prince, charming in manner, at once gentle and strong, a clever politician and a good general.

Flanders trembled upon hearing for the first time that melodious Italian voice call her friend instead of treating her as a rebel.

William understood that Farnese would do more for Spain with his promises than the Duc d'Alba with his tortures.

On the twenty-ninth of January, 1579, he made the provinces sign the Union of Utrecht, which was the fundamental basis of the public law of Holland. It was then that, fearing he could not execute by himself this plan of freedom for which he had been struggling for fifteen years, he offered to the Duc d'Anjou the sovereignty of the Netherlands, on condition that he would acknowledge the privileges of the Dutch and the Flemish and respect their freedom of conscience.

This was a terrible blow to Philip II. He responded to it by putting the price of 25,000 crowns on the head of William.

The States-General at the Hague then declared Philip II. deprived of the sovereignty of the Netherlands, and ordered that henceforth the oath of fealty should be made to them instead of to the king of Spain.

It was at this time that the Duc d'Anjou entered Belgium and was received there by the Flemish with the distrust which they felt for all strangers. But the support of France prom-

ised by the French was too important for them not to give him a kind and respectful welcome, at least apparently.

But the promise of Philip II. bore its fruit. In the midst of the fêtes for his reception, a pistol was fired at the side of the Prince of Orange; William staggered; they thought he was mortally wounded, but Holland still had need of him. The ball of the assassin had merely gone through both cheeks. The one who fired the shot was Jean Jaureguy, the forerunner of Balthazar Gerard, as Jean Chatel was the forerunner of Ravillac.

From all these events there remained to William a gloomy melancholy which was rarely lightened by a pensive smile. Flemish and Dutch respected this dreamer as they would have respected a god, for they felt that in him, and in him alone, lay their future; and when they saw him advance, wrapped in his wide cloak, his brow darkened by the shadow of his hat, his elbow in his left hand, his chin in his right, the men drew aside to make way for him; and mothers with a certain religious superstition pointed him out to their children, saying to them:

"Look, my son, that is the Silent."

At the suggestion of William, the Flemish then had chosen Francis of Valois, Duke of Brabant, Count of Flanders; that is, sovereign prince. This did not prevent Elizabeth from letting him hope for her hand. Rather the contrary. She saw in this alliance a means of reuniting with the Calvinists of England those of Flanders and France; in her wisdom she perhaps dreamed of a triple crown.

The Prince of Orange apparently favored the Duc d'Anjou, making for himself a provisional cloak of his popularity; ready to take from him the cloak when he thought the time had come to rid himself of the French power as he had rid himself of Spanish tyranny. This hypocritical ally was more formidable to the Duc d'Anjou than an enemy; he paralyzed the execution of every plan which might have given him too great power or too high influence in Flanders.

Philip II., seeing the entrance of a French prince in Brussels, had called the Duc de Guise to his aid, and this aid he claimed by virtue of a treaty once made between Don Juan of Austria and Henry de Guise.

The two young heroes, who were almost of the same age, had divined each other and by associating their ambitions had each pledged to conquer a kingdom for himself.

When on the death of his much feared brother, Philip II. found among the papers of the young prince the treaty signed by Henri de Guise, he did not seem to care. Besides, of what use to trouble himself about the ambition of a dead man? Did not the tomb hold the sword which could animate the letter? But a king of the strength of Philip II., who knew of what political importance two lines written by certain hands can be, could not leave in a collection of manuscripts and autographs, the attraction of visitors to the Escurial, the signature of Henri de Guise, a signature which was beginning to receive much credit among those dealers in royalty called the Oranges, the Valois, the Hapsbourgs, and the Tudors.

Philip II., therefore, prevailed on the Duc de Guise to continue with him the treaty made with Don Juan, a treaty the tenor of which was that Lorraine should support Spain in the possession of Flanders while Spain should aid Lorraine to bring to good issue the hereditary counsel which the cardinal had formerly ingrafted in his house. This hereditary counsel was nothing else than not to suspend for an instant the eternal labor which some fine day was to lead the workers to the usurpation of the kingdom of France.

De Guise consented; he could scarcely do otherwise. Philip II. threatened to send a duplicate treaty to Henry of France, and it was then that the Spaniard and the Lorraine sent to assassinate the Duc d'Anjou, conqueror and king in Flanders, Salcède, a Spaniard belonging to the house of Lorraine.

In fact, an assassination would end everything satisfactorily to the Spaniard and the Lorraine.

The Duc d'Anjou dead, there would be no further pretender to the throne of Flanders, no further successor to the crown of France.

The Prince of Orange would remain, but, as we already know, Philip II. held in readiness another Salcède named Jean Jaureguy.

Salcède was captured and executed on the Place de Grève, without having carried out his plan.

Jean Jaureguy wounded the Prince of Orange seriously, but it was nothing more than a wound.

The Duc d'Anjou and the Silent remained, therefore, apparently good friends, but in reality greater enemies than were those who wished to have them assassinated.

As we have said, the Duc d'Anjou had been received with

distrust. Brussels had opened its gates to him; but Brussels was neither Flanders nor Brabant; he had begun, therefore, either by persuasion or by force to advance into the Low Countries, to capture city by city, piece by piece, his reluctant kingdom; and at the suggestion of the Prince of Orange, who understood the Flemish sensitiveness, to devour leaf by leaf, as Cæsar Borgia would have said, the savory artichoke of Flanders.

The Flemish, on their side, did not defend themselves very brutally; they felt that the Duc d'Anjou would protect them vigorously against the Spaniards; to be sure, they were slow to accept their liberator, but at last they did accept him.

Francis, seeing that he advanced only step by step, grew impatient and stamped his foot.

"These people are slow and timid," said Francis to his good friends; "wait."

"These people are treacherous and fickle," said the Silent to the prince; "force them."

The result was that the duke, whose natural pride further exaggerated the slowness of the Flemish into a defeat, set to work to take by force the towns which did not yield as readily as he desired.

It was here that he was expected by his ally, the Silent, Prince of Orange, and his most gloomy enemy, Philip II., who were watching each other.

After some success, the Duc d'Anjou had encamped before Antwerp, to force this town, which the Duc d'Alba, Requesens, Don Juan, and the Duke of Parma had in turn bent under their yoke, without ever having exhausted it, and without ever for an instant having reduced it to slavery.

Antwerp had called the Duc d'Anjou to its aid against Alexander Farnese; when the Duc d'Anjou, in turn, wished to enter Antwerp, Antwerp pointed its guns at him.

Such was the position in which Francis of France was placed when we meet him in this story, the day after that on which Joyeuse and his fleet had joined him.

CHAPTER LXIV.

PREPARATIONS FOR BATTLE.

The camp of the new Duke of Brabant was situated on both banks of the Scheldt; the army, well disciplined, was, however, agitated by a spirit of unrest easy to understand.

In short, many Calvinists were aiding the Duc d'Anjou, not out of sympathy for the aforesaid duke, but in order to be as disagreeable as possible to Spain and the Catholics of France and England; they fought, therefore, rather from pride than from conviction or devotion, and they well knew that, the campaign once over, they would abandon their chief or impose conditions on him.

Besides, the Duc d'Anjou always let it be believed that he would anticipate these conditions. His favorite word was: "Henry of Navarre has become a Catholic, why should not Francis of France turn Huguenot?" On the other side — that is, with the enemy — there existed, on the contrary, in opposition to the moral and political differences, a distinctly arranged cause, the whole perfectly innocent of ambition and anger.

Antwerp at first had intended to surrender, but conditionally and at her own time; she did not exactly refuse the French, but she reserved the right to wait, strong in her situation and in the courage and warlike experience of her inhabitants; moreover, she knew that by extending her arm above the Duc de Guise, who was on watch in Lorraine, she found Alexander Farnese in the Luxembourg. Why, in case of necessity, should she not accept the help of Spain against Anjou as she had accepted the help of Anjou against Spain? — free, after that, to repulse Spain after Spain had aided her in repulsing Anjou.

These monotonous republicans had in them the brazen strength of good sense.

Suddenly they saw a fleet approaching the mouth of the Scheldt, and they learned that this fleet was coming with the grand admiral of France, and that the grand admiral of France was bringing assistance to their enemy.

Since he had laid siege to Antwerp the Duc d'Anjou naturally had become an enemy of the Antwerpers.

On perceiving the fleet, and on learning of the arrival of

Joyeuse, the Calvinists of the Duc d'Anjou made grimaces almost equal to those made by the Flemish. The Calvinists were very brave, but at the same time very jealous; they easily passed by questions of money, but did not like to have their laurels clipped, especially with swords which had served to drain the blood from so many Huguenots on Saint Bartholomew's day.

Hence many quarrels, which began the very evening of the arrival of Joyeuse, and continued triumphantly throughout the following day and the day after.

From the height of their ramparts the Antwerpers had the daily spectacle of ten or twelve duels between Catholics and Huguenots. The polders served as a tilting field, and they threw into the river many more bodies than an affair in open country would have cost the French. If the siege of Antwerp, like that of Troy, had lasted nine years, the besieged would have needed only to look at the besiegers: the latter would certainly have destroyed themselves.

In all these quarrels Francis carried on the office of mediator, but not without enormous difficulties: there had been engagements made with the French Huguenots; to wound these was to withdraw from the moral support of the Flemish Huguenots, who could aid him in Antwerp.

On the other hand, to offend the Catholics sent by the king to die in his service was for the Duc d'Anjou not only an impolitic, but a compromising act The arrival of this reënforcement, on which the Duc d'Anjou himself had not counted, had thrown the Spaniards into commotion, and on their side the Lorraines were bursting with fury. It was indeed something for the Duc d'Anjou to enjoy this twofold satisfaction. But the duke did not manage all parties without causing the discipline of his army to suffer greatly on account of it. Joyeuse, whom the mission had never pleased, we may remember, felt ill at ease in the midst of this gathering of men of such different sentiments; he felt instinctively that the time for success was over. Something like the presentiment of a great defeat was in the air, and in his idleness as courtier, as in his pride as captain, he deplored having come from such a distance to take part in a defeat.

So he thought in his mind, and aloud he said that the Duc d'Anjou had made a great mistake in laying siege to Antwerp. The Prince of Orange, who had given him this treacherous

advice, had disappeared after the advice had been followed, and no one knew what had become of him. His army was in garrison in the city, and he had promised the Duc d'Anjou the support of this army ; but there was not the slightest mention of there being any division between the soldiers of William and the Antwerpers, and the news of a single duel between the besieged had not come to gladden the besiegers since they had pitched their camp before the town.

That which Joyeuse especially dwelt on in his opposition to the siege was that the important city of Antwerp was almost a capital ; now, to possess an important city with the consent of this important city is a real advantage ; but to take by assault the second capital of his future States was to expose himself to the disaffection of the Flemish, and Joyeuse knew the Flemish too well, even supposing that the Duc d'Anjou took Antwerp, to hope that they would not avenge themselves sooner or later, and with interest, for the capture. This opinion Joyeuse expressed aloud in the duke's tent, the very night on which we introduced our readers to the French camp.

While a council was being held among his captains, the duke was seated or rather reclined on a long chair, which at need might be used as a couch, listening, not to the suggestions of the admiral of France, but to the whisperings of his lute-player Aurilly.

Aurilly, by his cowardly complaisance, by his base flattery and constant assiduity, had enchained the favor of the prince ; never had he served him as his other friends had done, by offending either the King or any other person of importance ; so that he had avoided the rock against which La Mole, Coconnas, Bussy, and many others had been shipwrecked.

With his lute, his love messages, his exact information concerning every one and the intrigues at court, with his clever manœuvres, to throw into the nets of the prince the prey which he coveted, whatever this prey might be, Aurilly had amassed in secret a large fortune, skilfully invested in case of reverses, so that he always seemed to be the poor musician Aurilly, running after a crown, and, like the grasshoppers, singing when hungry.

The influence of this man was immense because it was secret.

Seeing him thus interrupting his developments of strategy and diverting the attention of the duke, Joyeuse retired to the

rear, cutting short the thread of his conversation. Francis appeared as though he were not listening, but as a matter of fact he was listening; so the impatience of Joyeuse did not escape him, and at once:

"Admiral," said he, "what is the matter?"

"Nothing, monseigneur; I am merely waiting until your highness has time to listen to me."

"But I am listening, Monsieur de Joyeuse, I am listening," replied the duke, gayly. "Ah! you Parisians, you think me so dulled by the war in Flanders that you imagine me unable to listen to two people at the same time, when Cæsar dictated seven letters at once!"

"Monseigneur," replied Joyeuse, giving the poor musician a look at which the latter bowed with his customary humility, "I am no singer in need of an accompaniment when speaking."

"Good, good, duke; keep still, Aurilly."

Aurilly bowed.

"So," continued Francis, "you do not approve of my attack on Antwerp, Monsieur de Joyeuse?"

"No, monseigneur."

"And yet I adopted the plan in council."

"Therefore, monseigneur, it is with the greatest reserve that I speak, after so many experienced officers," and Joyeuse, as courtier, bowed to those around him.

Several voices were raised to assure the grand admiral that his opinion was theirs; others without speaking made signs of assent.

"Count de Saint Aignan," said the prince to one of his bravest colonels, "you are not of the opinion of Monsieur de Joyeuse, are you?"

"Yes, monseigneur," replied Monsieur de Saint Aignan.

"Ah! as you made a grimace" — Every one laughed. Joyeuse turned pale, the count grew crimson.

"If Monsieur le Comte de Saint Aignan," said Joyeuse, "is in the habit of giving his opinion in that manner, he is not a very polite courtier, that is all."

"Monsieur de Joyeuse," said Saint Aignan, quickly, "his highness is wrong to reproach me for an infirmity contracted in his service; at the capture of Cateau Cambrésis I received a blow on my head from a pike, and since then I have had nervous contractions, which cause the grimaces of which his highness complains — However, this is not an excuse I am

giving you, Monsieur de Joyeuse, but an explanation," said the count, proudly turning away.

"No, monsieur," said Joyeuse, holding out his hand to him, "it is a reproach you are making and you are right."

The blood mounted to the face of Duke Francis.

"And to whom this reproach?" said he.

"Why to me, probably, monseigneur."

"Why should Saint Aignan make a reproach to you, Monsieur de Joyeuse, you whom he does not know?"

"Because for an instant I thought that Monsieur Saint Aignan loved your highness so little that he advised you to take Antwerp."

"But," cried the prince, "my position must be defined in the country. I am Duke of Brabant, and Count of Flanders in name, I must be so in deed also. This Silent, who is hiding I know not where, spoke to me of a kingdom. Where is this kingdom? In Antwerp. Where is he? In Antwerp also, probably. Well, we must take Antwerp, and then we shall know where we stand."

"Well! monseigneur, you know that already, on my soul! or in truth you would be less of a good politician than people say. Who advised you to take Antwerp? The Prince of Orange, who disappeared the instant the campaign began; the Prince of Orange, who, while leaving your highness Duke of Brabant, reserved for himself the lieutenant-generalship of the duchy; the Prince of Orange, who is interested in ruining the Spaniards through you, and you through the Spaniards; the Prince of Orange, who will replace you, who will succeed you, if he has not already replaced you and succeeded you; the Prince of Orange — Well! monseigneur, until now, by following the advice of this Prince of Orange, you have done nothing but estrange the Flemish. Let a change for the worse occur and all those who dare not look you in the face will run after you like timid dogs who run after no one but fugitives."

"What! you think that I shall be defeated by wool merchants, by beer drinkers?"

"These wool merchants and beer drinkers caused a great deal of trouble to King Philip of Valois, to Emperor Charles V., and to King Philip II., who were three princes of sufficiently good family, monseigneur, for the comparison not to be very disagreeable to you."

"So you fear a defeat?"

"Yes, monseigneur, I fear it."

"In that case you will not be there, Monsieur de Joyeuse."

"Why, in that case, shall I not be there?"

"Because I wonder that you so doubt your own bravery that you already see yourself fleeing before the Flemish. In any case, reassure yourself; when these prudent merchants march to battle they are accustomed to wrapping themselves up in too heavy armor to have any chance of reaching you, even should they run after you."

"Monseigneur, I do not doubt my courage; I shall be in the first rank, but I shall be defeated in the first rank while others will be defeated in the rear, that is all."

"But still your reasoning is not logical, Monsieur de Joyeuse; you approve of my taking the small towns?"

"I approve of your taking that which is not defended."

"Well! after having taken the small towns which are not defended, as you say, I shall not retreat before the larger one because it is defended, or rather, because it threatens to defend itself."

"Your highness is wrong; it is better to retreat on sure ground than to fall into a ditch by continuing to march forward."

"Very well, I will fall, but I will not retreat."

"In this your highness will do as you please," said Joyeuse, bowing, "and we, on our part, will do as your highness wishes; we are here to obey you."

"That is not answering, duke."

"Nevertheless, that is the only answer I can give your highness."

"Come, prove to me that I am wrong; I ask nothing better than to be of your opinion."

"Monseigneur, see the army of the Prince of Orange: it was yours, was it not? Well! instead of camping with you in front of Antwerp, it is in Antwerp, which is very different. See the Silent, as you yourself call him: he was your friend and counsellor; not only do you not know what has become of this counsellor, but you seem to be sure that the friend has changed to an enemy. See the Flemish: on seeing you arrive in Flanders, they decked their boats and their walls. Now they close their doors at sight of you and level their cannon at your approach, neither more nor less than if you were the Duc d'Alba. Well! I tell you, Flemish and Hollanders, Antwerp

and Orange, are waiting only for a chance to combine against you, and this will come the moment you cry 'fire' to your chief of artillery."

"Well," replied the Duc d'Anjou, "at one blow we will defeat Antwerp and Orange, Flemish and Hollanders."

"No, monseigneur, because we have just enough men to make an assault on Antwerp, supposing that we have but to deal with the Antwerpers, and while we are attacking, the Silent, without saying a word, will fall on us, with his eternal eight or ten thousand men, always destroyed and always recovered, by the aid of which for ten or twelve years he has held in check the Duc d'Alba, Don Juan Requesens, and the Duc de Parma."

"So you persist in your opinion?"

"Which one?"

"That we shall be defeated."

"Infallibly."

"Well, it will be easy to escape, on your part, at least, Monsieur de Joyeuse," continued the prince, bitterly. "My brother sent you to me to help me; your responsibility will be safe if I dismiss you by telling you that I think I do not need to be aided."

"Your highness may dismiss me," said Joyeuse; "but on the eve of a battle, it would be a disgrace for me to accept your dismissal."

A long murmur of approbation followed the words of Joyeuse; the prince saw that he had gone too far.

"My dear admiral," said he, rising and embracing the young man, "you are not willing to understand me. It seems to me, however, that I am right, or rather that in my present position I cannot admit aloud that I have been wrong; you reproach me for my mistakes; I know them. I have been too jealous of the honor of my name; I have been too anxious to prove the superiority of the French arms, therefore I am wrong. But the evil is done, would you commit a worse one? Here we are before armed men, that is, before men who refuse us what they once offered me. Would you have me give in to them? In that case, they would soon take piece by piece that which I have won; no, the sword is drawn, let us strike, or we shall be struck; that is my idea."

"From the instant your highness speaks in that way," said Joyeuse, "I will refrain from adding a single word; I am

here to obey you, monseigneur, and as gladly, believe me, if you lead me to death as if you lead me to victory; and yet — but no, monseigneur."

"What?"

"No; I must and will be silent."

"No, for God's sake, speak, admiral; speak, I wish it!"

"Then in private, monseigneur."

"In private?"

"Yes, if it pleases your highness."

Every one arose and withdrew to the end of the spacious tent of Francis.

"Speak," said the latter.

"Monseigneur may take a repulse inflicted by Spain indifferently, a check which would make these Flemish beer drinkers triumphant, or this double-faced Prince of Orange; but could you accommodate yourself so easily to being laughed at by Monsieur le Duc de Guise?"

Francis frowned.

"Monsieur de Guise," said he, "why, what has he to do with all this?"

"Monsieur de Guise," continued Joyeuse, "has attempted, they say, to assassinate monseigneur. If Salcède did not confess it on the scaffold, he confessed it on the rack. Now, it is a great pleasure to offer to the Lorraine, who plays an important part in all this, or I am greatly mistaken, the fact of our being defeated at Antwerp, and to procure for him, who knows? without untying a purse, the death of a son of France, whom he had promised to pay so dearly to Salcède. Read the history of Flanders, monseigneur, and you will see that the Flemish are accustomed to fatten their lands with the blood of the most illustrious princes and the best French chevaliers."

The duke shook his head.

"Well! be it so, Joyeuse," said he, "if necessary, I will give the cursed Lorraine the joy of seeing me killed, but I will not give him that of seeing me retreat. I am thirsty for glory, Joyeuse, for I am the only one of my name, and still I have battles to win."

"And Cateau Cambrésis, which you forget, monseigneur? It is true that you are the only one."

"Compare that skirmish to Jarnac and Moncontour, Joyeuse, and estimate how much I owe my well-loved brother,

Henry. No, no," he added, "I am not a petty king of Navarre; I am a French prince."

Then turning to the gentlemen who, at the words of Joyeuse, had withdrawn:

"Gentlemen," said he, "the assault still holds good; the rain has stopped, the land is dry; we will attack to-night."

Joyeuse bowed.

"Will monseigneur kindly give his orders," said he; "we are waiting for them."

"You have eight vessels, without counting the admiral's galley, have you not, Monsieur de Joyeuse?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"You will force the line, and this will be easy, as the Antwerpers have in port only some merchant vessels; then you will bring your broadsides to bear upon the quay. From there, if the quay is defended, you will storm the city and attempt to land with your fifteen hundred men. From the rest of the army I will make two columns, one commanded by the Count de Saint Aignan, the other by myself. Both will attempt the escalade by surprise the moment the first shots of the cannon are heard. The cavalry will remain in reserve, in case of a repulse, to protect the retreat of the column which is driven back. Of these three attacks one will certainly succeed. The first corps reaching the rampart will fire a fusee to rally to it the other corps."

"But it is necessary to foresee everything, monseigneur," said Joyeuse. "Suppose that which you think impossible, namely, that the three columns of attack are all three repulsed?"

"In that case, we will gain the ships under the protection of the fire from our batteries, and we will spread ourselves in the polders, where the Antwerpers will not venture to follow us."

They bowed in sign of compliance.

"Now, gentlemen," said the duke, "silence. Let the sleeping troops be wakened, and let them embark with order; no firing, not a musket-shot must reveal our plan. You, admiral, will be at the port before the Antwerpers will have suspected your departure. We are going to cross the river and follow the left bank, and will arrive at the same time as you. Go now, gentlemen, and good courage. The luck which has followed us till now will not fear to cross the Scheldt with us."

The officers left the prince's tent and gave their orders with the precautions that had been advised.

Soon all this human swarm began to give out its confused murmuring; but one would have thought it was that of the wind playing among the gigantic reeds and the thick grasses of the polders.

The admiral returned to his galley.

CHAPTER LXV.

MONSEIGNEUR.

The Antwerpers, however, did not see with complacency the hostile preparations of Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou, and Joyeuse was not mistaken in attributing to them all possible ill will.

Antwerp was like a bee-hive which at night is calm and deserted on the outside, but within, full of noise and movement.

The Flemish, who were armed, patrolled the streets, barricaded their houses, doubled the chains, and fraternized with the battalions of the Prince of Orange, a part of which were already in garrison at Antwerp, and the other part of which were returning in companies, which as soon as they had entered, scattered themselves in the city.

When everything was ready for a vigorous defence, the Prince of Orange, on a dark and moonless night, entered the town without any manifestation, but with the calmness and the firmness which were apparent in the carrying out of all his resolutions when these resolutions were once taken.

He went to the Hôtel de Ville, where his friends had made everything ready for his arrival. There he received all the aldermen and centeniers of the bourgeoisie, reviewed the officers of the paid troops, and finally received the principal officers, whom he informed concerning his plans. Among his projects, the most important was to profit by the manifestation of the Duc d'Anjou against the city to break with him. The Duc d'Anjou had reached the point to which the Silent had wished to bring him, and it was with delight that the latter saw this new competitor for the sovereign power ruining himself like the others.

The same evening on which the Duc d'Anjou was preparing to attack, the Prince of Orange, as we have said, who had been in the city for two days, held a council with the commandant of the place for the bourgeois.

At each objection offered by the governor to the plan of defence of the Prince of Orange, if the objection were such as might cause any delay in the plans, the Prince of Orange shook his head like a man surprised at this uncertainty.

But at every shake of the head the commandant of the place replied:

"Prince, you know that it is a settled thing that monseigneur should come; let us therefore wait for monseigneur."

This magical word made the Silent frown; but although he frowned and bit his nails with impatience, he waited. Then each one fixed his eyes on a large clock that ticked loudly, and seemed to be asking the pendulum to hasten the coming of the personage so impatiently expected.

Nine o'clock at night sounded: the uncertainty became real anxiety; some scouts pretended to have seen a movement in the French camp.

A small flat boat, like the basin of a pair of scales, had been despatched across the Scheldt; the Antwerpers, still less anxious at what was taking place on the land-side than that which was taking place on the water-side, had wished to have news of the French flotilla; the small boat had not returned.

The Prince of Orange arose and biting his buff gloves in anger, said to the Antwerpers:

"Monseigneur is making us wait so long, gentlemen, that Antwerp will be taken and burned by the time he arrives; the city, therefore, can judge of the difference which exists on this point between the French and the Spanish."

These words were not spoken to reassure the civil authorities, and they looked at one another with great emotion.

At that moment a spy, who had been sent along the road to Molines, and who had ridden as far as Saint Nicholas, returned and announced that he had neither heard nor seen anything which in the least announced the arrival of the personage for whom they were waiting.

"Gentlemen," cried the Silent at this news, "you see we are waiting in vain; let us arrange our own affairs; time presses, and the country is in no way protected. It is well to have confidence in superior abilities; but you see that above

all, it is on ourselves we must rely. Let us therefore deliberate, gentlemen."

He had scarcely finished speaking before the door of the room opened, and a valet appeared and pronounced the one word which at such a moment seemed to be worth a thousand others:

"Monseigneur!"

In the man's tone, in the joy he could not keep from showing in performing his duty as usher, one could read the enthusiasm of the people, and all their confidence in the one whom they called by this vague and respectful name:

"Monseigneur!"

Scarcely had the sound of this voice, trembling with emotion, died away when a tall, imperious-looking man, wearing with infinite grace the cloak which completely enveloped him, entered the room, and courteously saluted those who were there.

But at the first glance his proud and piercing eye perceived the prince in the midst of his officers. He walked straight to him and held out his hand. The prince pressed it affectionately, and almost respectfully. They called each other monseigneur.

After this brief exchange of civilities the stranger removed his cloak.

He was dressed in a buff doublet, and wore cloth hose and long leather boots.

He was armed with a long sword which seemed to form a part, not of his costume, but of his limbs, so easily did it swing at his side; a small dagger was passed through his belt, near a pouch filled with papers.

As he threw aside his cloak they could see that the long boots, of which we have spoken, were greatly soiled from dust and mud.

At every step he took on the flag-stones, his spurs, red with the blood of his horse, gave out a sinister sound.

He seated himself at the council table.

"Well! where are we, monseigneur?" he demanded.

"Monseigneur," replied the Silent, "in coming hither you must have seen that the streets were barricaded."

"I saw that."

"And the houses turned into battlements," added an officer.

"As to that, I could not see it; but it is a wise precaution."

"And the chains doubled," said a third.

"Good," replied the stranger, carelessly.

"Monseigneur does not approve of these preparations of defence?" asked a voice with an evident accent of anxiety and disappointment.

"Yes," said the stranger, "and yet I do not think in our present circumstances that they are very useful; they weary the soldier and alarm the bourgeois. You have a plan of attack and defence, I presume?"

"We were waiting for monseigneur in order to tell it to him," replied the burgomaster.

"Speak, gentlemen, speak."

"Monseigneur arrived a little late," added the prince, "and in the meantime I had to act."

"And you did well, monseigneur; moreover, we know that when you act, you act well. Nor did I, believe me, lose time on the way."

Then turning to the bourgeois:

"We know through our spies," said the burgomaster, "that a movement is in preparation in the camp of the French; they are making ready for an attack; but as we do not know from which side the attack will take place, we have disposed the cannon so that it may be divided evenly the entire length of the rampart."

"That is wise," replied the stranger, with a slight smile, glancing cautiously at the prince, who was silent, letting all the bourgeois talk war to him, a soldier.

"It is the same with our civic troops," continued the burgomaster; "they are spread in double posts along the whole length of the walls, and have orders to run instantly to the point of attack."

The stranger said nothing; he seemed waiting for the Prince of Orange to speak.

"However," continued the burgomaster, "the opinion of the greatest number of the council is that it seems impossible that the French are planning anything but a feint."

"And with what object, this feint?" asked the stranger.

"In order to intimidate us and bring us to a friendly settlement which will deliver the city to the French."

The stranger again glanced at the Prince of Orange.

One would have said that he was ignorant of everything that was taking place, and listened to every word with an indifference which bordered on disdain.

"And yet," said an anxious voice, "this evening we thought we noticed preparations for an attack going on within the camp."

"Suspicions without foundation," said the burgomaster. "I myself examined the camp with an excellent field-glass from Strasbourg; the cannon seemed nailed to the ground, the men were preparing to sleep without any anxiety, and Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou was giving a dinner in his tent."

The stranger glanced again at the Prince of Orange. This time it seemed to him that a slight smile curled the lips of the Silent, while by a scarcely perceptible movement a scornful shrug of his shoulders accompanied the smile.

"Well! gentlemen," said the stranger, "you are completely mistaken; it is not a furtive attack they are preparing at present, it is a real and genuine assault you will have to sustain."

"Really?"

"Your plans, natural as they appear, are incomplete."

"And yet, monsieur," — said the bourgeois, humiliated that he seemed to doubt their knowledge of strategy.

"Incomplete," resumed the stranger, "in this, that you are expecting an attack, and have taken every precaution against such an event."

"Without doubt."

"Well! this attack, gentlemen, if you will believe me"—

"Finish, monseigneur."

"You need not expect, but you must give."

"Good!" cried the Prince of Orange, "this is talking!"

"At this very moment," continued the stranger, who understood from that instant that he had found a support in the prince, "the vessels of Monsieur de Joyeuse are getting under sail."

"How do you know that, monseigneur?" cried the burgomaster and the other members of the council in the same breath.

"I know it," said the stranger.

A murmur of doubt passed like a breeze through the assembly; but light as it was, it touched the ears of the clever warrior who had just been introduced upon the scene, to play there, in all probability, the principal rôle.

"Do you doubt it?" he asked with the greatest calm, and like a man accustomed to fight against all apprehension, all pride, and all bourgeois prejudices.

"We do not doubt it, since you say so, monseigneur. But, nevertheless, your highness will permit us to state" —

"Yes?"

"That if it were so" —

"Well?"

"We should hear of it."

"From whom?"

"From our marine spy."

PART III.

CHAPTER LXVI.

MONSEIGNEUR.

(Continued.)

Just then the usher admitted a man who entered the room with a heavy step, and advanced with respect now toward the burgomaster, now toward the Prince of Orange.

"Ah! ah!" said the burgomaster; "is it you, my friend?"

"I myself, Monsieur le Burgomaster," replied the newcomer.

"Monseigneur," said the burgomaster, "this is the man we sent as spy."

At this word "monseigneur," which was not addressed to the Prince of Orange, the spy made a gesture of surprise and delight, and advanced hastily, the better to see the one designated by that title.

The newcomer was one of those Flemish sailors whose type is easily recognizable, in that it is so marked: the square head, blue eyes, short neck, and broad shoulders. He entered, twisting his damp woollen cap between his heavy hands, and as he crossed the room he left behind him a wide track of water.

His heavy garments were literally soaked, and gave out an unpleasant moist odor.

"Ah! here is a brave fellow just returned from swimming," said the stranger, looking at the sailor with his usual air of authority, which at once impressed soldier and servant, because it implied strength and kindness.

"Yes, monseigneur, yes," said the sailor, with alacrity; "and the Scheldt is both wide and rapid, monseigneur."

"Speak, Goes, speak!" continued the stranger, well knowing the price of the favor he was bestowing on a simple sailor in calling him by name.

So, from that moment, the stranger seemed to exist for Goes alone. Although sent by another, to whom perhaps he should have given an account of his mission, Goes addressed himself to the stranger.

"Monseigneur," said he, "I set out in my small boat. By means of the password I was able to cross the *barrage* we made across the Scheldt with our boats, and pushed on as far as those damned Frenchmen. Ah! pardon me, monseigneur."

Goes stopped.

"Go on, go on," said the stranger, smiling, "I am only half French, and consequently I shall be only half damned."

"Well, then, monseigneur, — since monseigneur is good enough to pardon me" —

The stranger nodded. Goes continued.

"During the night, while I was rowing with my oars wrapped in linen, I heard a voice cry out: 'Boat ahoy! what do you want?'

"I supposed the words were addressed to me, and I was about to give some answer or other, when I heard behind me the cry of 'Admiral's boat.'"

The stranger looked at the officers with a nod of the head which meant:

"What did I tell you?"

"At the same instant," continued Goes, "and as I began to tack, I felt a terrible shock, my boat was overturned; the water covered my head, I rolled into a bottomless abyss; but the whirlpools of the Scheldt recognized me as an old acquaintance, and I again saw the light. It was simply the admiral's boat, which, in taking Monsieur de Joyeuse on board, had passed over me. God alone knows why I was not crushed or drowned!"

"Thanks, brave Goes, thanks," said the Prince of Orange, glad to see that his anticipations had been realized, "go now, and keep silent."

And extending his arm he laid a purse in Goes' hand. The sailor, however, still seemed to be waiting for something; it was his dismissal from the stranger.

The latter made a kindly motion of his hand, and Goes withdrew, apparently more satisfied with this sign than he had been with the gift from the Prince of Orange.

"Well!" said the stranger to the burgomaster, "what do you say to this report? Do you still doubt that the French

are getting under sail, and do you think that it was in order to pass the night on board that Monsieur de Joyeuse repaired from camp to the admiral's galley ?"

"But you predict, then, monseigneur ?" said the bourgeois.

"No more than monseigneur the Prince of Orange, who in all things is of my opinion, I am sure. But, like his highness, I am well informed, and above all, I know those who are on the other side."

And his hand indicated the polders.[1]

"So that," he continued, "it would surprise me greatly if they did not attack to-night. Therefore hold yourselves ready, gentlemen ; for, if you give them time, they will attack in good earnest."

"These gentlemen will do me the justice to acknowledge that before your arrival, monseigneur, I addressed the same words to them."

"But," demanded the burgomaster, "why does monseigneur think that the French will attack ?"

"These are the probabilities : The infantry is Catholic, it will fight alone ; that means it will attack on one side. The cavalry is Calvinist, and it will fight alone. Two sides. The naval forces belong to Monsieur de Joyeuse, who comes from Paris. The court knows with what object he left ; he will wish to have his share of fighting and glory. Three sides.

"Let us make three companies, then," said the burgomaster.

"Make one, gentlemen, a single one, with all that you have in the way of the best soldiers, and leave those about whom there is any doubt in open country to guard your walls ; then make a vigorous sortie with this company when the French are least expecting it. They plan an attack ; let them be forestalled and attacked themselves ; if you wait for an assault from them, you are lost ; for in an assault the French have no equal, as you gentlemen have no equal, when, in open country, you defend the approach to your towns."

The faces of the Flemish shone.

"What did I say, gentlemen ?" said the Silent.

"It is a great honor for me," said the stranger, "to have been unconsciously of the same opinion as the foremost captain of the century."

[1] Tracts of low land in Holland and Belgium reclaimed from the sea by means of high embankments. — *Tr.*

Both bowed courteously.

"So," continued the stranger, "the affair is settled: you will make a furious sortie on infantry and cavalry. I hope your officers will lead this sortie in such a way as to repulse the besiegers."

"But their vessels, their vessels," said the burgomaster; "they will force our barriers, and as the wind is northwest they will be in the heart of the city in two hours."

"You yourselves have six old vessels and thirty barks at Sainte Marie, that is, one league from here, have you not? That is your maritime barricade, your chain closing the Scheldt."

"Yes, monseigneur, it is just that. How do you know all these details?"

The stranger smiled.

"I know them, as you see," said he; "it is there that the issue of the battle lies."

"Then," said the burgomaster, "we must send reinforcements to our brave sailors."

"On the contrary, you can still dispose of the four hundred men who were there; twenty intelligent, brave, and devoted soldiers will suffice."

The Antwerpers opened their eyes wide.

"Do you wish," said the stranger, "to destroy the whole of the French fleet at the expense of your six old vessels and your thirty old boats?"

"Humph!" said the Antwerpers, looking at one another, "neither our vessels nor our boats are very old."

"Well! put a price on them," said the stranger, "and we will pay your price."

"There," said the Silent in a low voice to the stranger, "there are the men against whom I have to struggle daily. Oh! were it circumstances alone I had to fight against, I should already have conquered."

"Come, gentlemen," said the stranger, carrying his hand to his well-filled purse, "as we have said, give us a price, but do so quickly; you shall be paid in drafts on yourselves. I trust you will find them good."

"Monseigneur," said the burgomaster, after an instant's consultation with the aldermen, the tithing-men, and the centurions, "we are merchants and not lords; therefore you must pardon us for a certain hesitation, for our souls, you see, are

not in our bodies, but on our counters. However, there are certain circumstances in which, for the general good, we know how to make sacrifices. Dispose of our vessels, therefore, as you intend to do."

"Faith, monseigneur," said the Silent, "it is your affair. It would have taken me six months to obtain what you have accomplished in ten minutes."

"I will dispose, therefore, of your barrier, gentlemen, but in the following manner: The French, with the admiral's galley at their head, will attempt to force the passage. I will double the chains of the barrier by having them long enough for the fleet to find itself in the midst of your boats and vessels. Then from your boats and vessels the twenty brave men I have left there will throw grappling-irons, and this done they will escape in a boat after setting fire to your vessels, which are loaded with inflammable materials."

"And you intend," cried the Silent, "that the French fleet shall be entirely burned."

"Yes, entirely," said the stranger; "then, no retreat by sea, no retreat across the polders, for you will open the sluices at Malines, Berchem, Lier, Duffel, and Antwerp. Repulsed, first by you, pursued by your broken dykes, surrounded on all sides by the unexpected and ever-rising sea, the sea which will have but a flow and no ebb, the French will all be drowned, engulfed, annihilated."

The officers gave a cry of joy.

"There is one obstacle," said the prince.

"What one, monseigneur?" asked the stranger.

"This: it will take a whole day to despatch the various orders to the different towns, and we have only an hour."

"An hour will suffice," replied the one called monseigneur.

"But who will inform the flotilla?"

"It has already been informed."

"By whom?"

"By me. If these gentlemen had refused to give me the flotilla I would have bought it of them."

"But Malines, Lier, Duffel?"

"I passed through Malines and Lier, and I sent an agent to Duffel. At eleven o'clock the French will be beaten; at midnight the fleet will be burned; at one o'clock the French will be in full retreat; at two o'clock Malines will break the dikes, Lier will open its sluices, Duffel will turn its canals from their

beds, and the entire plain will become a furious ocean, which will ruin our homes, our fields, our woods, and our villages, it is true, but which, at the same time, I repeat, will destroy the French, and in such a way that not a single one will return to France."

A silence indicative of admiration and almost of fear followed these words; then suddenly the Flemish burst into applause. The Prince of Orange advanced toward the stranger and held out his hand to him.

"So, monseigneur, everything is ready on our side?"

"Everything," replied the stranger, "and, moreover, I think that everything is ready with the French," and he pointed to an officer who was raising the portière.

"Monseigneur and gentlemen," said the officer, "we have received word that the French are marching toward the city."

"To arms!" cried the burgomaster.

"To arms!" repeated the assistants.

"One instant, gentlemen," interrupted the stranger, with his strong, commanding voice, "you forget that I must give you a final suggestion, more important than all the others."

"Give it! Give it!" cried the voices.

"The French are to be surprised, so it will not even be a combat, not even a retreat, but a flight; to follow them we must be unencumbered. Off with your cuirasses, by Heaven! It is your cuirasses, in which you cannot move, which have been the cause of your losing every battle in which you have been defeated. Down with your cuirasses, gentlemen, down with your cuirasses!"

And the stranger showed his broad chest protected simply by a buff coat.

"We shall meet again in the fight, gentlemen," continued the stranger to the captains; "in the meantime go to the square of the Hôtel de Ville, where you will find all your men ready for battle. We will join you there."

"Thanks, monseigneur," said the prince to the stranger, "you have saved both Belgium and Holland."

"Prince, you overwhelm me," replied the latter.

"Will your highness consent to draw swords against the French?" asked the prince.

"I shall arrange so as to fight opposite the Huguenots," replied the stranger, bowing with a smile which his sombre companion might have envied him, and which God alone understood.

CHAPTER LXVII.

FRENCH AND FLEMISH.

Just as the council was leaving the city, and the officers were about to place themselves at the head of their men and to execute the orders of the unknown chief who seemed sent to the Flemish by Providence itself, a protracted noise which seemed to envelop the entire city was heard, followed by a great shout.

At the same time the artillery sounded.

This artillery surprised the French in the midst of their night march and just as they thought that they themselves were about to surprise the sleeping city. But instead of delaying their march it hastened it. If they could not take the city by surprise by means of scaling-ladders, as they called them in those days, they could, as we saw the King of Navarre do at Cahors, fill the ditch with fascines and blow up the gates with petards. The cannon of the ramparts continued to fire, but at night its effect was almost lost; after having responded by shouts to the shouts of their enemies, the French advanced in silence toward the rampart with the impetuous intrepidity which is habitual with them in an attack.

Suddenly gates and posterns opened and from all sides armed men rushed forth; it was not the ardent impetuousness of the French which animated them, it was a sort of heavy intoxication which did not prevent the movement of the soldier, but which rendered him as massive as a rolling wall.

The Flemish advanced in close ranks, in compact groups, above which an artillery more noisy than formidable continued to thunder.

It was a hand to hand encounter: the sword and the knife clashed; the pike and the sword crossed; pistol shots and the firing of musketry lighted the faces made red by blood.

Not a cry, not a murmur, not a complaint; the Flemish fought with rage, the French with spite. The Flemish were furious at having to fight, for they fight neither from nature nor from pleasure. The French were furious at having been attacked when they were about to attack.

They were fighting hand to hand with the blind fury which we cannot attempt to describe, when the booming of cannon

was heard from the direction of Sainte Marie, and a light rose about the city like a plume of flame.

It was Joyeuse making an attack, and causing a diversion by forcing the barrier which protected the Scheldt. He was about to penetrate with his fleet into the heart of the city.

At least, that is what the French hoped.

But it was not so.

Driven by a west wind, that is, by the one which is most favorable to such an undertaking, Joyeuse had weighed anchor, and, the admiral's galley at the head, he had taken advantage of the breeze which drove him on in spite of the current. Everything was ready for the fight; his sailors, armed with their boarding-swords, were at the rear; his gunners, with lighted matches, were near their pieces; his top-men with grenades; finally his picked sailors, armed with hatchets, held themselves in readiness to spring on the ships and boats of the enemy, and to break down chains and cords in order to make a pathway for the fleet.

They advanced in silence. The seven ships of Joyeuse, disposed in the shape of a wedge, of which the admiral's galley formed the most acute angle, seemed like a troop of gigantic phantoms gliding over the surface of the water. The young man, whose post was on the quarter-deck, could not remain there. Clad in magnificent armor, he had taken the place of the first lieutenant on the galley, and bending over the bowsprit, he seemed trying to pierce the fog of the river and the gloom of the night.

Before long he saw the dike appearing in the darkness, extending gloomily across the river; it seemed lonely and deserted. But in that country of ambush there was something alarming in this loneliness and solitude; they still advanced, however; they were in sight of the barrier, scarcely ten cables' lengths from it, and each second they were coming nearer, without a single "Who goes there?" having fallen on their ears.

The sailors saw in this silence nothing but a negligence on the part of the enemy, which pleased them; the young admiral, more far-seeing, surmised some treachery, which alarmed him.

At last the prow of the admiral's galley fixed itself in the rigging of the two ships which formed the centre of the barrier, and driving them before her, she turned the whole of the

flexible dike, the compartments of which were held together by chains, and which, yielding without breaking, were brought alongside of the French ships, assuming the same form as they themselves.

Suddenly, as the hatchet-bearers were receiving the order to descend and break the barrier, a shower of grapnel-irons, hurled by invisible hands, seized hold of the rigging of the French vessels.

The Flemish had forestalled the manœuvre of the French by doing what the latter were about to do.

Joyeuse thought that his enemies were offering him battle. He accepted it. The grapnel-hooks thrown from his side bound the ships of the enemy to his own by iron knots. Seizing a hatchet from the hands of a sailor, he was the first to rush upon the ship which was held in close embrace, and shouted:

"On board! On board!"

His entire crew followed him, officers and sailors, uttering the same cry as himself; but no shout answered his, no forces opposed him. All that he saw was three boats, filled with men, gliding silently down the river, like three belated sea-birds.

These boats, driven along by means of oars, disappeared like birds at a single flight.

The assailants stood motionless on the ships they had just boarded without a struggle.

It was the same along the entire line.

All at once Joyeuse heard a dull rumbling under his feet, and an odor of sulphur filled the air.

A thought flashed through his mind; he ran to a hatchway and raised it; the inside of the ship was on fire.

At the same instant the cry, "To the ships! To the ships!" resounded along the entire line.

Each one rushed back in greater haste than he had left. Joyeuse, the first to come down, was the last to return. Just as he reached the side of his galley, the fire lighted up the deck of the vessel he had left.

Then the flames shot forth as from twenty volcanoes: every boat, every sloop, every vessel was a crater. The French fleet, of a much greater tonnage, seemed to dominate an abyss of fire.

The order had been given to cut the ropes, to break the

chains, to unfasten the grapnel-hooks; the sailors rushed into the rigging with the swiftness of men convinced that their safety depended on their swiftness. But the work was enormous. Perhaps they might have cut away the grapnel-hooks which had been thrown by the enemy on to the French fleet, but there were still those hurled by the French fleet on to the vessels of their enemies. Suddenly twenty explosions were heard; the French ships trembled from bow to stern, groaning from their very depths.

It was the guns which protected the dyke, and which, loaded to the mouth and abandoned by the Antwerpers, were volleying forth of their own accord and in proportion as the flames reached them, destroying without discrimination everything in their pathway.

The flames rose like gigantic serpents to the top of the masts, rolled around the yards, and with their forked tongues licked the copper-colored sides of the French ships.

Joyeuse, in his magnificent armor inlaid with gold, gave his orders in a calm and imperious voice in the midst of all the flames, resembling one of those fabulous Salamanders, with the thousand scales, which, at every movement, shook off a shower of sparks.

But soon the explosions increased, stronger and more terrible; it was no longer the cannon which were thundering, it was the powder-magazines which were catching on fire, it was the ships themselves which were exploding.

As long as he had hoped to break the mortal bands which tied him to his enemies, Joyeuse had fought, but there was no further hope of succeeding; the flames had reached the French vessels, and as each ship of the enemy blew up, a shower of sparks fell upon his deck like a cluster of fire-works.

The fire was Greek fire, that implacable flame which feeds on that which extinguishes other fires and which devours its prey to the very edge of the water.

The Antwerp ships, in bursting, had broken down the dykes; but the French vessels, instead of continuing on their way, began to drift, dragging after them, as they burned, some fragments of the consuming firebrand which had embraced them in its flaming arms.

Joyeuse understood that no further struggle was possible; he gave orders to lower the boats and to land on the left bank.

The order was transmitted to the other boats by the aid of speaking-trumpets; those who did not hear it, instinctively carried out the same idea.

The entire crew, to the last sailor, embarked before Joyeuse left the deck of his galley.

His coolness seemed to have brought back coolness to every one; each of his sailors carried a hatchet and boarding-sword.

Before he had reached the bank of the river, the admiral's galley blew up, lighting up on one side the silhouette of the city, and on the other the long horizon of the river, which flowed on, ever winding, until it was lost in the sea.

In the meantime the artillery on the ramparts had ceased its firing, not that the fighting had lessened in fury, but, on the contrary, because the Flemish and the French, having come to the point of fighting hand to hand, could not fire on one without hitting the other.

The Calvinist cavalry had charged in turn, doing wonders. Before their onset a path was made under the very feet of the horses, but the wounded Flemish ripped open the animals with their broad knives.

In spite of this brilliant cavalry charge, some disorder arose in the French ranks, and they could merely stand still instead of advancing, while the gates of the city constantly poured forth fresh battalions, which rushed upon the army of the Duc d'Anjou.

Suddenly a great rumble was heard almost beneath the walls of the city. The cries, "Anjou, Anjou! France, France!" rose among the ranks of the Antwerpers and a frightful shudder shook the whole mass, so closed in by the simple impulse of those who drove it that the foremost were brave because they could not be otherwise.

This movement was caused by Joyeuse; the shouts were given by the sailors, fifteen hundred men, who, armed with hatchets and knives, and led by Joyeuse, to whom some one had brought a riderless horse, at once fell on the Flemish. They had to avenge their burning fleet and two hundred of their companions who had been burned or drowned.

They did not choose their rank in battle, but they rushed upon the first group which, from its language and costume, they recognized as the enemy.

No one handled a long sword better than Joyeuse; his wrist turned like a steel wheel, and every blow with the edge

of the sword cut open a head, every thrust with its point made a hole in a man.

The group of Flemish on whom Joyeuse fell was devoured like a grain of wheat by a legion of locusts.

Intoxicated by this first success, the soldiers pushed forward. While they gained ground, the Calvinist cavalry, surrounded by these crowds of men, lost it little by little; but the infantry of the Count of Saint Aignan managed to fight hand to hand with the Flemish.

The prince had seen the burning of the fleet in the distance; he had heard the thundering of the cannon and the explosion of the ships without suspecting anything beyond a fierce combat which on that side would naturally terminate in a victory for Joyeuse. The idea of supposing that a few Flemish vessels would fight against a French fleet! Therefore, he was expecting every minute a diversion on the part of Joyeuse, when suddenly he was told that the fleet was destroyed and that Joyeuse and his sailors were fighting in the midst of the Flemish.

Immediately the prince began to feel anxious; the fleet was the reserve and consequently the safety of the army.

The duke sent orders to the Calvinist cavalry to attempt a fresh charge, and exhausted riders and horsemen rallied to rush again upon the Antwerpers.

The voice of Joyeuse was heard shouting in the midst of the confusion:

"Stand firm, Monsieur de Saint Aignan! France, France!"

And like a reaper mowing down a field of wheat, his sword swung in the air and laid at his feet a harvest of men. The weak favorite, the delicate sybarite, seemed with his cuirass to have put on the fabulous strength of the Nemæan Hercules.

The infantry, hearing the voice that gave that shout and seeing that sword gleam in the darkness, again took heart and, the like the cavalry, made a fresh effort and returned to the fight.

But about that time the man whom they called monseigneur left the city on a beautiful black horse. He wore black armor, that is, a helmet, armlets, cuirass, and thigh pieces of burnished steel. He was followed by five hundred well-mounted horsemen whom the Prince of Orange had put under his command.

On his side, William the Silent, with his picked infantry, who had not yet been in battle, left by the parallel gate.

The cavalier in the black armor hastened to where he was most needed; that was in the spot where Joyeuse and his sailors were fighting.

The Flemish recognized him and separated before him, crying joyfully:

"Monseigneur! Monseigneur!"

Joyeuse and his sailors felt the enemy giving way; they heard the shouts, and suddenly found themselves face to face with this fresh company, which seemed to appear suddenly before them as by magic.

Joyeuse rode his horse up to the black cavalier. and both met in sombre fury.

At the first clash of their swords, a shower of sparks shot forth. Joyeuse, confident of the temper of his armor and of his knowledge of fencing, dealt some fierce blows which were skilfully parried. At the same time a thrust from his adversary touched him full in the chest, and, gliding over his cuirass, in spite of the armor drew some drops of blood from his shoulder.

"Ah!" cried the young admiral, feeling the point of the iron, "this man is a Frenchman, and more, this man has studied fencing under the same master as myself."

At these words, the stranger was seen to turn and try to throw himself upon another point.

"If you are French," cried Joyeuse to him, "you are a traitor, for you are fighting against your king, your country, and your flag."

The stranger replied merely by turning and attacking Joyeuse with fury.

But this time Joyeuse was forewarned, and knew with what a skilful swordsman he had to deal. He parried three or four blows successively with as much cleverness as rage, with as much strength as anger.

Then it was the stranger who, in turn, made a movement as though to retreat.

"See!" cried the young man, "this is what one does when one fights for one's country; a pure heart and loyal aim are enough to defend a head without a helmet, a brow without a visor."

And tearing away the straps of his helmet, he threw it from him, uncovering his noble and beautiful head, his eyes shining with vigor, pride, and youth.

Instead of answering or following the example given him, the man in the black armor uttered a dull groan and raised his sword over the bare head.

"Ah!" exclaimed Joyeuse, parrying the thrust, "I said truly that you were a traitor, and as traitor you shall die," and he dealt him two or three blows in succession, one of which penetrated an opening of the visor of his helmet.

"Ah! I will kill you," cried the young man; "and I will remove your helmet which protects you and hides you so well, and I will hang you to the first tree I meet on my way."

The stranger was about to reply, when a horseman who had just joined him leaned over and said to him:

"Monseigneur, no more skirmishing; your presence is needed yonder."

The stranger looked in the direction indicated by the speaker's hand and saw the Flemish hesitating before the Calvinist cavalry.

"Yes," said he in a sombre voice, "those are the ones I am looking for."

Just then a troop of horsemen fell upon the sailors of Joyeuse, who, wearied from constant use of their heavy arms, began for the first time to retreat.

The black cavalier took advantage of this movement to disappear in the confusion and darkness.

A quarter of an hour later, the French gave way along the whole line and tried to escape.

Monsieur de Saint Aignan took every measure to obtain from his men a retreat in good order.

But a last troop of five hundred horse and two thousand foot-soldiers came out from the city perfectly fresh, and fell on this army, harassed and already beginning to retreat. These were the old soldiers of the Prince of Orange, who in turn had fought against the Duc d'Alba, Don Juan, Requesens, and Alexander Farnese.

It was then decided to leave the field of battle and retreat by land, since the fleet on which they had counted in case of accident was destroyed.

In spite of the coolness of the chiefs, in spite of the bravery of the greater number, a frightful rout took place.

It was at this moment that the stranger, with all the cavalry, which had scarcely been in the fight, fell on the fugitives and

again came upon Joyeuse, at the rear, and his sailors, two-thirds of whom he had left on the battlefield.

The young admiral was mounted on his third horse, the two others having been killed under him. His sword was broken, but he had snatched from the hands of a wounded sailor one of the heavy boarding-hatchets, which he whirled about his head with the same ease as though it were a sling in the hands of a slinger.

From time to time he turned about, like those wild boars which cannot make up their minds to flee, and which return desperately upon the hunter.

On their side, the Flemish, who, according to the advice of the one they had called monseigneur, had fought without cuirasses, were quick to pursue and did not give a second's respite to the Angevine army.

Something like remorse, or at least hesitation, seized the heart of the stranger in the face of this great disaster.

"Enough, gentlemen, enough," said he, in French, to his soldiers, "they have been chased to-night from Antwerp, and in eight days they will be driven out of Flanders; let us not ask more from the god of war."

"Ah! you are a Frenchman! you are a Frenchman; I guessed you were, traitor. Ah! may you be d——, and die the death of traitors!"

This furious imprecation seemed to discourage the man whom a thousand swords raised against him had not discouraged. He turned, and conqueror though he was, fled almost as hurriedly as the conquered.

But this retreat of a single man changed nothing on the face of things; fear is contageous; it had gained the entire army, and under the weight of that mad pain, the soldiers began to run like madmen.

The horses grew animated in spite of fatigue, for they themselves seemed under the influence of fear; the men scattered to find shelter. In a few hours the army no longer existed as an army.

It was time, according to the orders of monseigneur, for the dykes to be opened and the sluices to be raised. From Lier to Termonde, from Haesdonk to Malines, every little river swollen by its tributaries, every overflowing canal, sent across the flat country its contingent of furious water. So, when the retreating French, having outrun their enemies, began

to halt; when they had seen the Antwerpers return at last to their city, followed by the soldiers of the Prince of Orange; when those who had escaped safe and sound from the carnage of the night began to think they would at last be saved, and breathed again for an instant, some with a prayer, others with a curse, — then it was that a new enemy, blind and pitiless, was let loose upon them with the speed of the wind, with the impetuosity of the sea; yet in spite of the imminence of the danger which was beginning to surround them, the fugitives suspected nothing.

Joyeuse had commanded his sailors, reduced to eight hundred, to halt. They were the only ones who had preserved any sort of order in the frighful rout.

The count of Saint Aignan, breathless, voiceless, speaking only by his threatening gestures, strove to rally his scattered foot-soldiers.

The Duc d'Anjou, at the head of the fugitives, mounted on a fine horse, and accompanied by a servant leading another horse by the bridle, pushed forward without apparently thinking of anything.

"The wretch has no heart," said some.

"The brave man is magnificent in his coolness," said others.

A few hours of rest snatched between two and six o'clock in the morning gave the foot-soldiers strength to continue the retreat.

But food was lacking.

As to the horses, they seemed more weary than the men, and could scarcely drag themselves along, for they had not eaten since the previous evening. They followed at the rear of the army.

The men hoped to reach Brussels, which belonged to the duke, and where they had many partisans; and yet they were not without anxiety as to its good will. For an instant, too, they had thought themselves able to count on Antwerp, as they now believed they could count on Brussels.

There, at Brussels, scarcely eight leagues from where they were, they could provision the troops, and take an advantageous position in order to recommence the interrupted campaign when they should think it desirable. The remnants which they picked up would serve as a nucleus for a new army.

But even at that hour no one foresaw the frightful moment when the earth was to slip from under the feet of the wretched

soldiers; when mountains of water were to rise, beat them down and roll over their heads; when the remains of so many brave men, carried away by the muddy waters, would roll into the sea, or stop on the way to enrich the countries of Brabant.

Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou had his breakfast served in the hut of a peasant, between Héboken and Heckhout.

The hut was empty, the inhabitants having fled the previous evening; the fire lighted by them at that time still burned on the hearth.

The soldiers and the officers strove to imitate their chief, and scattered through the two towns we have just named; but they saw with surprise mingled with terror that all the houses were deserted and that the inhabitants had carried away almost all the provisions. The count of Saint Aignan, like the others, took his chance.

The indifference of the Duc d'Anjou, at the very hour when so many brave men were dying for him, disgusted him, and he went away from the prince.

He was one of those who said, "The wretch has no heart."

On his own account, he visited two or three houses which he found empty; he knocked at the door of a fourth, when he heard from some of the soldiers that all around for a distance of two miles, that is, in the circle of the country which they occupied, all the houses were vacant.

At this news Monsieur de Saint Aignan scowled and made his usual grimace.

"March on, gentlemen, march on!" said he to his officers.

"But," replied the latter, "we are worn out, and dying of hunger, general."

"Yes; but you are alive, and if you remain here another hour, you will be dead; perhaps it is already too late."

Monsieur de Saint Aignan could tell nothing, but he suspected that some great danger lurked in that solitude.

They broke up camp.

The Duc d'Anjou took the lead, Monsieur de Saint Aignan retained the centre, and Joyeuse took charge of the rear guard. But two or three thousand men, either weakened by their wounds or harassed by fatigue, separated from the others, and lay down in the grass or at the foot of the trees, abandoned, lonely, struck by a sinister presentiment. With them remained the unmounted cavalrymen, those whose horses could

no longer drag themselves along, or who had been wounded on the march. With the Duc d'Anjou there remained scarcely three thousand men strong enough and in any condition to fight.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE TRAVELLERS.

While this disaster, the precursor of a still greater disaster, was taking place, two travellers mounted on excellent horses issued from the gate of Brussels one cool night on their way towards Malines.

They rode side by side, their cloaks tucked up, without visible arms except a large Flemish knife, the brass handle of which shone in the belt of one of them. These travellers rode abreast, each following his own line of thought, possibly the same, without exchanging a single word.

They had the appearance and the costume of those Picardy hawkers, who at that time carried on an active commerce between the kingdoms of France and Flanders, and who were a kind of travelling agents, at once active and simple, who at that period did the work of those of to-day, without suspecting that it was part of the specialty of the great commercial propaganda.

Whoever had seen them riding so quietly along the moonlit road would have taken them for good people hastening to find a bed after a well-spent day.

However, it was merely necessary to hear a few phrases detached from their conversation by the wind, when they carried on any conversation, to rid one's self of this erroneous opinion caused by their appearance.

The strangest of the words exchanged between them was the first one they uttered when they had come to within almost half a mile of Brussels.

"Madame," said the stouter to the slenderer of the two, "you were indeed right to start this evening. We shall make seven miles on this ride, and shall reach Malines, in all probability, just as the results of the attack on Antwerp are known. The people will be thoroughly intoxicated by the triumph. By two days of very short rides, and in order to rest you will need to make short stays, — by two days of short rides we shall

reach Antwerp, and probably at the very hour that the prince will have returned from his joy, when he will deign to look upon the earth after having been raised to the seventh heaven."

The companion whom he called madame was in no wise displeased by this appellation in spite of her man's clothes, and replied in a voice at once calm, grave, and gentle:

"Believe me, my friend, God will grow weary of protecting this wretched prince and will strike him cruelly; let us hasten, therefore, to carry out our projects, for I am not of those who believe in fatality, and I think that men have freedom of will and of action. If we do not act and let God act, it would not have been worth while to have lived so wretchedly until now."

At that moment a breeze from the northwest passed by, piercing and icy.

"You shiver, madame," said the older of the two travellers. "Take your cloak."

"No, Rémy, thank you. You well know that I no longer feel either bodily pain or mental anguish."

Rémy raised his eyes to Heaven and remained plunged in sombre silence.

Occasionally he stopped his horse and turned round in his stirrups, while his companion went on ahead as mute as an equestrian statue.

After one of these momentary halts, when her companion had rejoined her:

"You see no one behind us?" said she.

"No, madame, no one."

"The cavalier who overtook us that night at Valenciennes and who inquired about us after having observed us so long in surprise?"

"I no longer see him."

"But it seems to me that I saw him before entering, monsieur."

"And I, madame, I am sure that I saw him before entering Brussels."

"Brussels, you say?"

"Yes, but he must have stopped in this last city."

"Rémy," said the lady, approaching her companion, as if she feared that some one might overhear her on the deserted road, "Rémy, did it not seem that he resembled" —

"Whom, madame?"

"In figure, at least, for I did not see his face, that unhappy young man?"

"Oh, no, no, madame," Rémy hastened to say. "Not the least in the world. And, besides, how could he have imagined that we had left Paris and were on this road?"

"Why, in the same way that he knew where we were, Rémy, when we changed our home in Paris."

"No, no, madame," said Rémy, "he has neither followed us nor had us followed, and, as I said to you some time ago, I have strong reasons for believing that he has resorted to desperate measures, but in regard to himself alone."

"Alas! Rémy. Every one has his share of suffering in this world. May God lighten that of this poor man!"

Rémy replied by a sigh to the sigh of his mistress and they continued their way without other sound than that made by the foot-falls of the horses on the echoing road.

Two hours passed in that way.

Just as our travellers were about to enter Vilvorde, Rémy turned his head. He had heard the galloping of a horse at the turn of the road. He stopped, listened, but saw nothing.

In vain his eyes strove to pierce the darkness of the night, but as no further sound broke its solemn silence he entered the hamlet with his companion.

"Madame," said he, "daylight will soon be here. If you will trust to me, we shall stop now. The horses are tired, and you need rest."

"Rémy," said the lady, "you know that it is in vain you try to hide from me what you feel. Rémy, you are uneasy."

"Yes, in regard to your health, madame. Believe me, a woman cannot bear such fatigue. I can scarcely do so myself."

"Do as you wish, Rémy," replied the lady.

"Well, then, enter this narrow street, at the end of which I see a lantern dimly shining. That is the sign by which we recognize inns. Hasten, I beg you."

"You heard something, then?"

"Yes; like the step of a horse. It is true that I think I am mistaken, but at all events I will linger behind you an instant to make sure whether my suspicions are true or not."

The lady did not reply, and without trying to turn Rémy

from his intention, put spurs to her horse, which entered the long and winding street.

Rémy let her go on ahead, jumped to the ground, and dropped the bridle of his horse, which naturally followed that of his companion.

As to Rémy, he waited, bending down behind a huge post.

The lady knocked at the door of the inn, behind which, according to the hospitable custom of Flanders, a servant with broad shoulders and strong arms slept.

The woman had already heard the sound of the horse clattering on the pavement of the street, and awakened, without losing her temper. She opened the door, and received the traveller in her arms.

Then she opened, for the two horses, the large arched doors, through which they rushed, recognizing the stable.

"I will wait for my companion," said the lady. "In the meantime, let me sit down by the fire. I will not go to bed until he has come."

The servant threw down some straw for the horses, closed the door of the stable, returned to the kitchen, drew up a stool to the fire, snuffed the thick candle with her fingers, and went to sleep again.

In the meantime, Rémy, who had placed himself in ambush, was watching for the coming of the traveller the galloping of whose horse he had heard.

He saw him enter the hamlet, ride along slowly, listening attentively, then having reached the narrow street he saw the lantern and seemed to hesitate whether to pass by or go on towards it.

He stopped two feet from Rémy, who felt his horse's breath on his shoulder.

Rémy laid his hand on his knife.

"It is indeed he," he murmured, "following us still! What can he want of us?"

The traveller crossed his arms on his breast, while his horse breathed with difficulty, stretching out his neck.

He spoke not a single word, but by the fire in his eye, looking now forward, now backward, now into the narrow street, it was not difficult to guess that he was asking himself whether he should turn back, ride on, or turn towards the inn.

"They have not stopped," said he in a low voice, "I shall ride on."

And giving the reins to his horse he continued his way.

"To-morrow," said Rémy to himself, "we will change our road."

Then he rejoined his companion, who was waiting impatiently.

"Well," said she in a low tone, "is any one following us?"

"No one. I was mistaken. There is no one but ourselves on the road, and you may sleep in all safety."

"Oh, I am not sleepy, Rémy; you know that very well."

"At least you will have supper, madame, for all yesterday you ate nothing."

"Willingly, Rémy."

They awakened the poor servant, who arose a second time with the same good-natured manner as at first, and who, on learning what was wanted, drew from the buffet a quarter of salt pork, a cold hare, and some preserves. Then she brought a pot of Louvain beer, foaming and pearly.

Rémy sat down at the table next to his mistress. The latter half filled a glass with the beer, with which she moistened her lips, broke a piece of bread, a few crumbs of which she ate, and then turned around in her chair, and pushed away glass and bread.

"What! you are not going to eat anything more, my good man?" asked the servant.

"No; I have finished, thank you."

Then the servant looked at Rémy, who took the bread broken by his mistress, ate it slowly, and drank a glass of beer.

"But the meat?" said she. "You do not eat meat, monsieur?"

"No, my child, thank you."

"You do not think it good?"

"I am sure that it is excellent, but I am not hungry."

The servant clasped her hands to express the astonishment caused by this strange abstemiousness.

It was not thus that her travelling fellow-countrymen were accustomed to treat her.

Rémy, understanding that there was some anger in the servant's manner, threw a piece of silver on the table.

"Oh," said the servant, "for what you have had, my God, you may take back your money. Six farthings' worth for you both."

"Keep the whole piece, my good girl," said the woman. "My brother and I are sparing, it is true, but we do not wish to lessen your profit."

The servant became crimson with joy, yet at the same time tears of compassion moistened her eyes, so sadly had these words been uttered.

"Tell me, my child," said Rémy, "is there a cross road from here to Malines?"

"Yes, monsieur, but it is a bad one, while on the contrary — monsieur perhaps does not know that there is an excellent highway."

"Yes, my child, I knew that, but I must travel by the other."

"Well, I warn you, monsieur, because as your companion is a woman the road will be doubly hard for her."

"And why, my good girl?"

"Because to-night a large number of peasants are crossing the country on their way to Brussels."

"To Brussels?"

"Yes, they are going every moment."

"Why so?"

"I do not know. That is the order."

"An order from whom? The Prince of Orange?"

"No, from monseigneur."

"Who is this monseigneur?"

"Ah, you ask me too much, monsieur. I do not know. But however that may be, since last evening they have been going."

"Who are these emigrants?"

"The inhabitants of the country, the villages, the hamlets, who have neither dykes nor ramparts."

"That is strange," said Remy.

"Why, we ourselves are to leave at daybreak like every one else from the hamlet," said the girl. "Yesterday at eleven o'clock all the cattle were sent to Brussels by the canals and cross roads. That is why the road of which I speak to you is filled with horses, carts, and people."

"Why not the highway? The highway, it seems to me, would be an easier retreat for you."

"I do not know. It is the order."

Rémy and his companion looked at each other.

"But we can keep on this road, can we not? We are going to Malines?"

"I think so. At least unless you prefer to do like every one else, that is, go to Brussels."

Rémy looked at his companion.

"No, no; we will set out at once for Malines!" cried the lady, rising, "open the stable if you please, my good woman."

Rémy, like his companion, arose, murmuring in a low tone:

"Danger for danger. I prefer the one I know. Besides, the young man is ahead of us, and if, by chance, he were to wait for us, — well, we shall see!"

And as the horses had not been even unsaddled, he held the stirrup for his companion, sprang into his own saddle, and daybreak found them on the banks of the Dyle.

CHAPTER LXIX.

EXPLANATION.

The danger which Rémy ran was a real danger, for the traveller of the night, having passed through the hamlet and ridden on for a quarter of a league, perceiving no one on the road, realized that those he was following had stopped in the village.

He was not willing to retrace his steps, no doubt in order to make his pursuit seem as natural as possible; but he lay down in a field of clover, having taken the precaution of making his horse descend into one of the deep ditches which in Flanders serve as boundary lines between estates.

The result of this manœuvre was that the young man could see everything without being seen. We already recognize this young man as Henry du Bouchage. Rémy had recognized him also, and the lady had suspected who he was. By some strange fatality he had again been thrown in the presence of the woman whom he had sworn to flee from.

After his conversation with Rémy on the threshold of the mysterious house, that is, after the loss of all hope, Henry had returned to the Hôtel de Joyeuse, fully decided, as he had said, to give up a life which dawned so wretchedly for him; and, gentlemen at heart and a good son, for he had his father's name to keep pure, he had determined upon the glorious suicide of the battlefield.

Now, they were fighting in Flanders; the Duc de Joyeuse, his brother, commanded an army and could give him an opportunity of getting rid of life. Henry did not hesitate. He left his hotel at the close of the following day, that is, twenty hours after the departure of Rémy and his companion.

Letters which had arrived from Flanders announced a decisive attack on Antwerp. Henry flattered himself he would arrive in time. He took pleasure in the thought that at least he would die sword in hand, in the arms of his brother, beneath a French flag; that his death would cause much talk, and that this talk would penetrate the shadows in which the lady of the mysterious house lived.

Noble folly! glorious and gloomy dreams! Henry lived four whole days on his grief, and especially on the hope which it was soon to bring to an end.

Wholly absorbed in these dreams of death, he suddenly perceived the painted spire of the steeple of Valenciennes, and as eight o'clock struck from the tower, he saw that they were about to close the gates; he clapped spurs to his horse, and, passing through the drawbridge, just escaped knocking down a man who was tightening the girths of his saddle.

Henry was not one of those insolent nobles who trampled under foot everything which was not an escutcheon. As he passed he made apologies to the man, who glanced round at the sound of his voice, and then at once turned away.

Henry, carried on by the speed of his horse, whom he strove in vain to stop, trembled as though he had seen something unexpected.

"Oh! I am mad!" he thought; "Rémy at Valenciennes! Rémy, whom I left four days ago in the street Du Bussy; Rémy without his mistress, for he had a young man for companion, it seems to me! In truth, grief is affecting my brain and impairing my eyesight to such a degree that everything which surrounds me is clothed with the form of my unchangeable ideas."

And, continuing on his way, he entered the town without the suspicion which had flashed through his mind having taken root there for a single instant.

He stopped at the first inn he came to, threw his bridle to a stable-boy, and sat down before the door on a bench, while they prepared his room and supper.

But as he sat pensive on this bench, he saw the two trav-

ellers pass, riding side by side, and he noticed that the one he had taken for Rémy frequently turned his head.

The other had his face hidden under a broad-brimmed hat. As he passed in front of the inn, Rémy saw Henry on the bench and again turned aside his head; but this precaution helped even to make him known.

"Oh! this time," murmured Henry, "I am not mistaken. My blood is cool, my eye bright, my ideas clear; recovered from my first hallucination, I am complete master of myself. Now the same phenomenon occurs again, and I still think I recognize Rémy in one of those travellers, that is, the servant of the house in the faubourg. No!" continued he, "I cannot remain in such uncertainty; I must enlighten my doubts without delay."

This resolution taken, Henry rose and set out on the highway in the footsteps of the two travellers; but whether they had already entered some house, or whether they had taken another road, Henry saw them no more.

He ran to the gates; they were closed.

So the travellers could not have gone out.

Henry entered every inn, questioned, sought, and finally learned that two travellers had been seen riding toward an inn of humble appearance, situated in the Rue de Beffroi.

The host was occupied in closing up for the night when Du Bouchage entered.

While the man, attracted by the good looks of the young traveller, offered him his house and his services, Henry gazed into the reception-room, and from where he stood could again see, at the top of the stairs, Rémy, who was going up, lighted by the lamp in the hands of a servant.

Henry could not see Rémy's companion, who, no doubt, had ascended first and had disappeared.

At the top of the stairs Rémy stopped.

Upon seeing that it was really he, the count uttered an exclamation, at the sound of which Rémy turned round.

From his face, so unmistakable from the scar which furrowed it, and from his anxious glance, Henry had no further doubt, and too moved to act at once, he went away, asking himself with a horrible tightening of the heart, why Rémy had left his mistress, and why he was riding alone on the same road as he himself.

We say alone, because at first Henry had paid no attention to the second horseman.

His thoughts rolled from abyss to abyss.

The following day, at the hour when the gates were opened, when he thought he should be face to face with the two travellers, he was greatly surprised to learn that during the night they had obtained permission from the governor to leave ; and that, contrary to all custom, the gates had been opened for them.

By this means, and as they had left at one o'clock in the morning, they had six hours' start of Henry.

He had to make up these six hours. Henry put his horse to the gallop, and at Mons overtook the travellers, whom he passed.

He again saw Rémy, but this time Rémy would have had to be a sorcerer to recognize him. Henry was muffled up in a soldier's great cloak, and had brought another horse.

However, the distrustful eye of the faithful servant almost succeeded in baffling this combination. The companion of Rémy, warned by a single word, turned aside his face, which again Henry was unable to see.

But the young man did not lose courage : he made inquiries in the first inn which gave shelter to travellers, and, as he accompanied his questions with an irresistible auxiliary, he finally learned that the companion of Rémy was a very beautiful young man, but very sad, sober, resigned, and that he never spoke of being tired.

Henry trembled as a thought flashed through his mind.

"Might it not be a woman ?" he asked.

"That is possible," replied the host; "nowadays many women ride disguised to join their lovers in the army of Flanders, and as our attitude to our guests is to notice nothing, we notice nothing."

This explanation broke Henry's heart. Was it not probable, indeed, that Rémy was accompanying his mistress disguised as a man ? Then, if that were so, Henry saw nothing but trouble in the undertaking.

No doubt, as the host had said, the unknown lady was going to join her lover in Flanders.

Rémy therefore had lied when he spoke of her eternal regrets; his story of a past love which would forever clothe his mistress in mourning he had invented to get rid of an importunate lover.

"Well, in that case," said Henry to himself, more overwhelmed by this hope than he had ever been by his despair; "so much the better! The time will come when I shall have an opportunity to speak to this woman and to reproach her with the subterfuges which will lower her, who holds such a high position in my thoughts and in my love, to the level of ordinary women; then, then, I who had imagined her an almost divine creature, seeing this brilliant exterior of a wholly ordinary soul, perhaps, I will hurl myself from the summit of my illusions and from the height of my love."

And the young man tore his hair and struck his breast at the idea that he would perhaps lose in one day the love and the illusions which were killing him, so true is it that a dead heart is better than an empty one.

He was at this point, having passed them, as we have said, and was dreaming of the reason which could have sent these two personages, so indispensable to his existence, to Flanders at the same time as himself when he saw them entering Brussels.

We know how he followed them.

At Brussels Henry gained important information as to the campaign planned by the Duc d'Anjou.

The Flemish were too hostile to the Duc d'Anjou to receive a Frenchman of distinction warmly; they were too proud of the success which the national cause had just won, for it was already a success to see Antwerp close its gates to the prince whom the people of Flanders had called to reign over them; they were too proud, we say, of this success to neglect to humiliate somewhat the gentleman who came from France, and who questioned them with the purest Parisian accent possible, an accent, which, from all time, has seemed so ridiculous to the Belgian people.

Henry now felt serious fears as to this expedition in which his brother was playing so important a part; he determined, consequently, to hasten his journey to Antwerp. It was an indescribable surprise to him to see Rémy and his companion, whatever interest they might have in not being recognized, following without deviation the same road which he was taking. It proved that both were aiming at the same goal.

On leaving the hamlet, Henry hidden in the clover field in which we left him, was sure, this time at least, of clearly seeing the young man who was accompanying Rémy.

Then he would realize the truth and put an end to all uncertainty.

It was then, as we have said, that he beat his breast, so afraid was he of losing the fancy which was devouring him, and which made him live a thousand lives, while killing him.

When the two travellers passed in front of the young man they were far from suspecting that he was hidden there; the lady was busy smoothing her hair, which she had not had time to arrange at the inn. Henry saw her, recognized her, and almost fell fainting into the ditch in which his horse was calmy grazing.

The travellers passed.

Then anger took possession of Henry, who had been good and patient so long as he had thought that the inhabitants of the mysterious house were as loyal as he himself had been.

But after the protestations of Rémy, after the hypocritical consolation of the lady, this journey, or rather this disappearance, constituted a sort of treason towards the man who had so persistently, but at the same time so respectfully, besieged her door.

When Henry had somewhat recovered from this last blow, he shook his beautiful blond hair, wiped his forehead, wet with perspiration, and remounted his horse, fully decided no longer to resort to any of the precautions which respect for himself had made him take, and set out openly and with uncovered face after the travellers. No more cloak, no more hood, no more hesitation on his journey; the road was to him as it was to others, therefore he took possession of it quietly, regulating the steps of his horse according to those of the two horses in front of him.

He had decided to speak neither to Rémy nor to his companion, but merely to make himself known to them.

"Oh! yes, yes," said he to himself, "if there remains in them a particle of feeling, my presence, although brought about by chance, will be nothing less than a bloody reproach for those cruel beings who break my heart at pleasure."

He had not ridden five hundred steps behind the two travellers before Rémy saw him.

Perceiving him thus deliberately, then openly, advancing with raised and uncovered head, Rémy grew anxious.

The lady noticed this and turned around.

"Ah!" said she; "is it not that young man, Rémy?"

Rémy still strove to throw her off the track and to reassure her.

"I think not, madame," said he; "so far as I can judge by his clothes, he is a young Walloon soldier no doubt going to Amsterdam, and passing by the scene of the war to seek some adventure there."

"No matter, I am uneasy, Rémy."

"Reassure yourself, madame; if this young man were the Count du Bouchage, he would already have spoken to us; you know he was persevering."

"I know also that he was respectful, Rémy; otherwise I should have been contented to say to you, 'Get rid of him, Rémy,' and I should have been troubled no further."

"Well, madame, if he were respectful, he has still preserved this respect, and you will have nothing more to fear from him, supposing that it is he, on the road from Brussels to Antwerp, than in Paris in the Rue de Bussy."

"Never mind," continued the lady, still looking behind her, "here we are at Malines; let us change horses if necessary, in order to ride more quickly, but let us hasten and reach Antwerp, let us hasten."

"On the contrary, I would say to you, madame, let us not enter Malines; our horses are good, let us push on as far as the hamlet which we see yonder on the left, and which I think is called Villebrock. In this way we shall avoid town, inn, questions, and curious people, and it will be less embarrassing for us to change our horses or clothes, if we have to change."

"Well, Rémy, straight to the town, then."

They turned to the left into a scarcely opened path, but one which apparently led to Villebrock.

Henry left the road at the same place, took the same path they did, and followed them, still keeping his distance.

The anxiety of Rémy showed itself in sidewise looks, in his agitated manner, especially in that action which had become habitual to him, of looking behind him with a sort of threat, and of suddenly clapping spurs to his horse.

These various symptoms, we may readily understand, did not escape his companion.

They reached Villebrock.

Of the two hundred houses which composed this town not one was inhabited; some forgotten dogs and a few stray cats ran frightened in the solitude, some calling their masters with

long howls, others fleeing lightly away, and stopping, when they thought themselves safe, to show their mobile noses under the cross-beam of a doorway, or from the air-hole of a cellar.

Rémy knocked in twenty places, saw nothing, and was seen by no one.

On his part, Henry, who seemed a shadow attached to the steps of the travellers, had stopped at the first house in town, had knocked at the door, but in vain, like those who preceded him; and then having surmised that the war was the cause of this desertion, he waited to start again until the travellers had come to a decision. This they did after their horses had breakfasted on the grain which Rémy found in the bin of a deserted inn.

"Madame," then said Rémy, "we are no longer in a quiet country nor among ordinary surroundings, and it is not right for us to expose ourselves like children. We will surely fall in with a band of French or Flemish, without counting the Spanish partisans, for in the strange situation in which the people of Flanders are, all sorts of highwaymen, adventurers from every country, are swarming through it; if you were a man, I should speak differently to you, but you are a woman, you are young, you are beautiful; you therefore run a double danger — for your life and your honor."

"Oh! my life, my life, that is nothing," said the lady.

"It is everything, on the contrary, madame," replied Rémy, "when life has an object."

"Well, what would you suggest, then? Think and act for me, Rémy; you know that my thoughts are not on this earth."

"Then, madame," replied the servant, "let us remain here, if you will trust me. I see here many houses which can offer a sure refuge, I have weapons; we can defend ourselves and hide, according as I may think our position strong or weak."

"No, Rémy, no; I must go on, nothing shall stop me," replied the lady, shaking her head; "if I had fears they would be only for you."

"Then," said Rémy, "let us ride on."

And he pushed forward without adding a word. The unknown lady followed him, and Henry du Bouchage, who had stopped at the same time, resumed his journey with them.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE WATER.

As the travellers advanced, the country assumed a strange aspect.

It seemed as deserted as the towns and villages. In short, nowhere were cows seen grazing in the fields, nowhere was the goat clinging to the sides of the mountain or running along the hedges to reach the green buds of the bramble-bushes and the young vines, nowhere were seen the shepherd and his flock, nowhere the plough and its laborer, no hawker passing from one country to another, his bale on his back, no teamster singing the hoarse song of the Northman, and swinging along merchant fashion, by the side of his cart, a heavy stick in his hand.

As far as eye could reach across the magnificent plains, over the small hills, and the deep grasses, to the edge of the woods beyond, not a human figure was to be seen, not a voice to be heard. One would have said that it was nature the night before man and beast were created.

Evening came on and Henry, filled with surprise, and drawn by his feelings close to the travellers who preceded him, asked of the air, the trees, the distant horizon, even of the clouds, an explanation of this sinister phenomenon.

The only persons who animated the gloomy solitude were Rémy and his companion, outlined against the purple tint of the setting sun, leaning over to hear if there were not some sound; then behind them, a hundred feet away, the figure of Henry, always keeping the same distance and the same attitude.

Night descended dark and cold; the wind from the north-west whistled through the air and filled the solitude with its sound more threatening than the silence.

Rémy stopped his companion by laying his hand on the reins of her horse.

"Madame," said he, "you know that I am not given to fear, you know that I would not take one backward step to save my life, but this evening something strange possesses me, an unknown torpor chains my faculties, paralyzes me, and prevents my going further. Madame, call this terror, timidity, or even

panic; I will admit it — for the first time in my life, I am afraid."

The lady turned; perhaps all these gloomy presentiments had escaped her, perhaps she had seen nothing.

"He is still there?" she asked.

"Oh, it is no longer a question of him," replied Rémy; "think no more of him, I beg you; he is alone, and I am equal to a single man. No, the danger I fear, or rather feel and divine, with a sort of instinct rather than by aid of my reason, — this danger which approaches, threatens, and which perhaps surrounds us, is different, strange, that is why I call it a danger."

The lady shook her head.

"Madame," said Rémy, "do you see yonder some willows bending their black tops?"

"Yes."

"By the side of those trees I perceive a small house; for pity's sake, let us go there; if it is inhabited, all the more reason for demanding hospitality; if not, let us take possession of it, madame. Do not make any objection, I beseech you."

Rémy's emotion, his trembling voice, the touching persuasion of his words, induced his companion to yield.

She turned her horse in the direction indicated by Rémy.

A few minutes later the travellers knocked at the door of the house, which stood under a clump of willows.

A river, an affluent of the Nethe, a small river which ran a quarter of a league from there, enclosed between two arms of reeds and grassy banks, bathed the feet of the willows with its murmuring water; behind the house, built of brick and covered with tiles, was a small garden, surrounded by a quickset hedge.

Everything was empty, solitary, desolate.

No one answered the repeated knocks of the travellers.

Rémy hesitated no longer, but drew his knife, cut a willow twig and inserted it between the door and the lock and bore down on the bolt.

The door opened.

Rémy entered quickly. For an hour he had acted with the nervousness of a man working under the influence of a fever. The lock — clumsy result of the work of a neighboring smith — yielded without resistance.

Rémy hurriedly pushed his companion into the house, closed the door behind him, drew the massive bolt, and thus retrenched, breathed as if he had just recovered his life.

Not content with having sheltered his mistress thus, he installed himself in a solitary room on the first floor, in which, by feeling about, he came upon a bed, a chair, and a table. Then, somewhat easy on her account, he descended to the ground floor, and sat down to watch between the iron bars of the window, through a half-open shutter, the movements of the count, who, seeing them enter the house, had instantly drawn near.

The reflections of Henry were sombre and in harmony with those of Rémy.

"Surely," said he to himself, "some danger unknown to us, but known to the inhabitants, hovers over the land; the war is ravaging the country; the French have taken Antwerp or are going to take it; seized with terror, the peasants have sought shelter in the cities."

This explanation was plausible and yet it did not satisfy the young man.

Moreover, it brought him to another line of thought.

"What are Rémy and his mistress going to do in this part of the country?" he asked himself. "What imperative necessity drives them towards this terrible danger? Oh! I shall know, for the moment has finally come to speak to this woman and to put an end forever to all my doubts. Nowhere has so good an opportunity presented itself."

And he advanced towards the house.

But suddenly he stopped.

"No, no," said he, with one of those sudden hesitations so common to hearts in love, "no, I will be the martyr to the end. Besides, is she not mistress of her actions, and does she know what story has been invented about her by her miserable Rémy? Oh! it is with him, it is with him alone I am vexed, with him, who assured me that she loved no one! But still, let me be just: should this man betray to me, a stranger, the secrets of his mistress? No, no! My wretchedness is certain, and the worst of it is that it comes from myself alone and that I cannot throw its weight on any one. What it lacks is the whole revelation of the truth; I must see this woman arrive at camp, hanging on the arm of some gentleman, and saying to him: 'See how I have suffered, and realize how I love you!'

Well, I will follow her as far as that; I will see what I dread to see, and I will die for it; it will be pain spared the musket and cannon. Alas! thou knowest it, my God!" added Henry, with one of those outbursts which at times lay deep in his soul, full of religion and love, "I did not seek the supreme agony; I was going smiling to a settled, calm, and glorious death; I wanted to fall on the battlefield with one name on my lips, thine, O God! with one name in my heart, hers! Thou hast not so willed it. Thou hast destined me to a despairing death, full of bitterness and torture; praise be to Thee, I accept it!"

Then, recalling the days of waiting and the nights of agony which he had spent before that inexorable house, he found, on the whole, apart from the doubt which was gnawing at his heart, that his position was less cruel than in Paris, for he now could see her occasionally and could hear the sound of her voice, which he had not heard before; and in following her, some of those subtle perfumes which emanate from the woman we love had mingled with the breeze and come to caress his face.

So he continued, his eyes fixed on the hut in which she was hiding.

"But while waiting for this death, and while she is in this house, I will take these trees for a shelter; and yet I complain, I, who can hear her voice if she speaks, I, who can see her shadow behind the window! Oh! no! no! I will not complain. Lord, Lord! I am indeed too happy!" and Henry lay down under the willows, the branches of which covered the house, and listened with a feeling of melancholy impossible to describe to the murmur of the water running at his side. Suddenly he shuddered: the noise of cannon sounded from the north and passed by, borne by the wind.

"Ah!" said he to himself, "I shall arrive too late; they are attacking Antwerp."

Henry's first thought was to rise, remount his horse, and ride, guided by the sound, to where they were fighting; but to do this he would have to leave the unknown lady and die in doubt.

Had he not met her on the road, Henry would have continued his way, without a backward glance, without a sigh for the past, without a regret for the future; but by meeting her, doubt had entered into his soul, and with doubt, irresolution. He remained, therefore.

For two hours he lay there, listening to the successive reports which mocked him, asking himself what could be the irregular and louder reports which from time to time interrupted the others.

He was far from suspecting that these sounds were caused by the blowing up of the vessels of his brother.

At last, towards two o'clock, everything grew calm; by half-past two all was still. The noise of the cannon had not reached the interior of the house, apparently, or, if it had, the temporary inhabitants were insensible to it.

"By this time," said Henry to himself, "Antwerp is taken, and my brother is conqueror; but after Antwerp comes Ghent; after Ghent, Bruges, and I shall still have an opportunity to die gloriously. But before dying I want to know what this woman seeks in the camp of the French."

After these sounds, which had shaken the air, had ceased, Nature sank to rest, and Joyeuse, covered with his cloak, became quiet.

He had fallen into that kind of drowsiness, which, toward the close of the night, the will of man cannot resist, when suddenly his horse, which was grazing a few feet from him, pricked up his ears and neighed mournfully.

Henry opened his eyes.

The animal, standing on his four feet, his head turned in the opposite direction from his body, was drawing in the air, which, having changed at the approach of daylight, came from the southeast.

"What is the matter, my good steed?" asked the young man, rising and patting the animal's neck with his hand; "have you seen some otter pass, which frightened you, or are you regretting the shelter of a good stable?"

The animal, as if he understood the question, and was trying to answer, looked in the direction of Lier with a quick, nervous motion and, with eyes fixed and nostrils open, listened.

"Ah! ah!" murmured Henry, "it is more serious than I thought, apparently; perhaps some troops of wolves following the army to devour bodies."

The horse neighed, bent his head, and by a movement as quick as lightning started toward the west.

But as he started, he passed within reach of the hand of his master, who seized him by the bridle and stopped him.

Henry, without gathering hold of the reins, caught hold by

the mane and sprang into the saddle. Once there, as he was a good horseman, he mastered the animal and kept him under control.

But at the end of an instant, that which the horse had heard Henry himself began to hear, and the terror which the lower brute had felt, the man was astonished to feel in turn.

A long murmur, like that of the wind, at once strident and melancholy, rose from different points of a semi-circle which seemed to extend from the south to the north; puffs of fresh breeze charged with particles of water at intervals lightened the murmur, which then became like the roar of the tide rising on a pebbly beach.

"What is that?" asked Henry, "can it be the wind? No, since it is the wind which brings me the noise, and since the two sounds seem distinct. An army on the march, perhaps? but no" (he placed his ear to the ground), "I should hear the fall of the feet, the clashing of arms, the murmur of voices. Is it the crackling of a fire? No, again, for no light is visible on the horizon, and the sky seems dark."

The sound increased and became a roar, incessant, deep, rumbling, such as thousands of cannon might produce, dragged from a distance over an echoing pavement.

For an instant Henry thought he had found the cause of the noise, in attributing it to what we have mentioned, but immediately:

"Impossible," said he, "there is no paved street around here, and not a thousand cannon in the army."

The sound came nearer. Henry put his horse to a gallop and rode to a hill.

"What do I see?" he cried, as he reached the summit.

That which the young man saw, his horse had seen before him, for he could not make him advance in that direction except by tearing his sides with his spurs, and when he reached the summit of the hill the animal reared so that his rider was almost thrown from him. That which they saw, horse and rider, was a long, pale band on the horizon and level with it, advancing over the plain, forming an immense circle and rushing towards the sea.

By degrees the band grew wider and wider in the eyes of Henry, like a piece of cloth which one unfolds.

The young man, still undecided, looked at this strange phenomenon, when on glancing at the place he had just left,

he saw that the prairie was becoming saturated with water, that the little river was overflowing its banks, and beginning to hide beneath its bosom, upheaved without visible cause, the reeds which a quarter of an hour before had stood on the two banks.

Gently the water was reaching to the side of the house.

"Wretched madman that I am!" exclaimed Henry. "I did not dream of this! It is the water! the water! The Flemish have broken their dikes!"

Henry at once rushed to the house and knocked furiously at the door.

"Open! open!" he cried.

No one answered.

"Open, Rémy," cried the young man, furious from terror. "Open, it is I, Henry du Bouchage, open!"

"Oh! you need not tell me your name, count," replied Rémy from within, "I recognized you long ago; but I warn you of one thing: if you force this door, you will find me behind it, a pistol in each hand."

"But you do not understand, wretched man!" cried Henry in a tone of despair; "the water, the water, it is the water!"

"No invention, no pretext, no dishonorable ruses, count. I tell you that you will enter here only by passing over my body."

"In that case I will pass over it!" cried Henry, "but I will enter. In Heaven's name, in God's name, in the name of your safety and that of your mistress, will you open the door?"

"No!"

The young man looked around him and saw one of those Homeric stones, such as Ajax Telamon rolled upon his enemies; he raised this between his arms, lifted it above his head, and approaching the house, hurled it at the door.

The latter broke into fragments.

At the same time a ball whizzed by the ears of Henry, but failed to touch him.

Henry sprang upon Rémy, who fired his second pistol, but the priming alone caught fire.

"Why, you can easily see that I am not armed, madman!" cried Henry; "do not defend yourself any longer against a man who is not attacking you, but look! look!"

And he dragged him to the window, which he broke with a blow of his fist.

"Now!" said he, "do you see? do you see?"

And he showed him an immense sheet of water which was growing white along the horizon, and which, as it drew near, thundered like the front of a mighty army.

"The water!" murmured Rémy.

"Yes! the water! the water!" cried Henry; "it is coming upon us; look below; the river is overflowing, it rises; in five minutes we cannot get away from here."

"Madame!" cried Rémy, "madame!"

"No shouting, no fright, Rémy. Make ready the horses; but quick! quick!"

"He loves her," thought Rémy, "he will save her."

Rémy ran to the stable. Henry rushed to the stairs.

At Rémy's cry the lady had opened her door.

The young man raised her in his arms as he would have raised a child.

But she, thinking it treason or violence, struggled with all her might, and clung to the partitions.

"Tell her," cried Henry, "tell her that I am saving her!"

Rémy heard the young man's cry, just as he returned with the two horses.

"Yes! yes!" he cried. "Yes, madame, he is saving you, or rather he will save you; come! come!"

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE FLIGHT.

Henry, without losing time to reassure the lady, carried her out of the house, and attempted to place her on his horse with him. But with a movement of uncontrollable repugnance she slipped out of his encircling arms, and was caught by Rémy, who seated her on the horse prepared for her.

"Oh! what are you doing, madame?" cried Henry, "how you misunderstand my heart. It is not a question of myself, believe me, or of the pleasure of holding you in my arms, or of pressing you against my breast, although for that privilege I would gladly sacrifice my life; it is a question of fleeing more rapidly than a bird. Look! look! See the birds flying by."

In truth, in the early light of dawn they saw flocks of curlews and of pigeons flying through the air in rapid and startled flight, and in the night — the usual refuge of the silent bat — these noisy flocks, favored by the sombre wind, conveyed something sinister to the ear and startling to the eye.

The lady did not reply, but as she was in her saddle she rode forward without turning her head.

However, her horse and Rémy's, having journeyed for two days, were wearied.

At every instant Henry turned back, and seeing that they were unable to keep up with him :

"See, madame," said he, "how my horse keeps ahead of yours, and yet I am holding him back with both hands. For pity's sake, madame, while there is still time, I am not asking to carry you in my arms, but take my horse and give me yours."

"Thank you, no, monsieur," replied the lady in her still, calm voice, and without betraying the least anger in her tone.

"But, madame," cried Henry, glancing desperately behind him, "the water is gaining on us. Listen ! listen !"

That instant a horrible crashing was heard. It was the dike of a village, which the flood had just broken down. Beams, props, terraces had given way, a double row of piles had broken in with a thundering noise, and the water rushing over all this ruin was beginning to flood a forest of oak-trees, the tops of which quivered and the branches of which cracked as if a whole legion of devils were passing beneath them.

The uprooted trees dashed against the pines, the timbers of the fallen houses floated on the surface of the water, the distant neighing of horses, the cries of men carried away by the flood, formed a concert of sounds so strange and so lugubrious that the shudder which went through Henry passed to the calm, indomitable heart of the stranger.

She clapped spurs to her horse, and the animal, as though he himself felt the imminence of the danger, redoubled his efforts to escape from it.

But the water was gaining, still gaining, and in ten minutes it was evident that it would overtake the travellers.

Every instant Henry stopped to wait for his companions and cry out :

"Quicker, madame, for pity's sake, quicker. The water is gaining on us. It is rushing, here it is !"

In short, it had reached them, foaming, turbulent, raging; it carried away like a feather the house in which Rémy had sheltered his mistress; it raised like a bit of straw the bark fastened to the bank of the river; and majestic, mighty, coiling its waves like the rings of a serpent, it towered like a wall over the horses of Rémy and the lady.

Henry uttered a cry of terror and turned upon the water as if he would fight it.

"You see you are lost," he shouted in despair, "but, madame, perhaps there is still time. Dismount, come with me, come!"

"No, monsieur," said she.

"But in a minute it will be too late. Look, look behind you."

The lady turned her head. The water was scarcely fifty feet from her.

"Let my destiny be accomplished," said she. "You, monsieur, flee! flee!"

Rémy's horse, exhausted, fell forward, unable to rise, in spite of the efforts of his rider.

"Save her! save her!" cried Rémy, "even in spite of herself."

As the faithful servant leaned over to free himself from his stirrups, the water rolled down like a gigantic tomb over his head.

At sight of this his mistress uttered a terrible cry, and sprang from her horse, resolved to die with Rémy.

But Henry, seeing her intention, had jumped down at the same time. He seized her and circled her waist with his right arm; then remounted his horse and darted forward like an arrow.

"Rémy! Rémy!" cried the lady, her arms extended toward him, "Rémy!"

A cry answered her. Rémy had come up to the surface of the water, and, although half unconscious, with that indomitable hope which sustains a dying man to the end of his agony, he began to swim, supported by a beam.

His horse passed by him, beating the air desperately with his forefeet while the water gained on the horse of his mistress, while not more than twenty feet away Henry and his companion no longer ran but flew on the third horse, wild with terror.

Rémy no longer regretted life, since he thought that she whom he loved would be saved.

"Farewell, madame, farewell!" he cried; "I leave first and I will tell the one who awaits us that you are living to"—

He did not finish. A mountain of water passed over his head and broke at the feet of Henry's horse.

"Rémy! Rémy!" cried the lady, "Rémy! I wish to die with you. Monsieur, I will wait for him. Monsieur, I wish to dismount. In the name of the living God, I will!"

She uttered these words with such fierceness and savage authority that the young man loosened his arms and let her slip to the ground, saying,

"Very well, madame, we will all three die here; thanks to you, you have given me a joy for which I never hoped."

As he uttered these words and still holding his horse, the roaring water reached him as it had reached Rémy, but by a last effort of love he still held the arm of the young woman who had jumped to the ground.

The flood swept over them. The raging water rolled them for several seconds pell mell with other débris.

It was a sublime sight, the coolness of this man so young and so devoted, whose shoulders rose above the water while he held his companion by the hand, and while his knees, guiding the last efforts of the expiring horse, strove to be useful in the supreme efforts of his agony.

For an instant there was a terrible struggle, during which the lady, sustained by Henry's right hand, still kept her head above the water, while with his left hand Henry pushed aside the masses of floating wood and the corpses, contact with which would have drowned or killed his horse.

As it passed them, one of these floating bodies sighed out:

"Farewell, madame, farewell!"

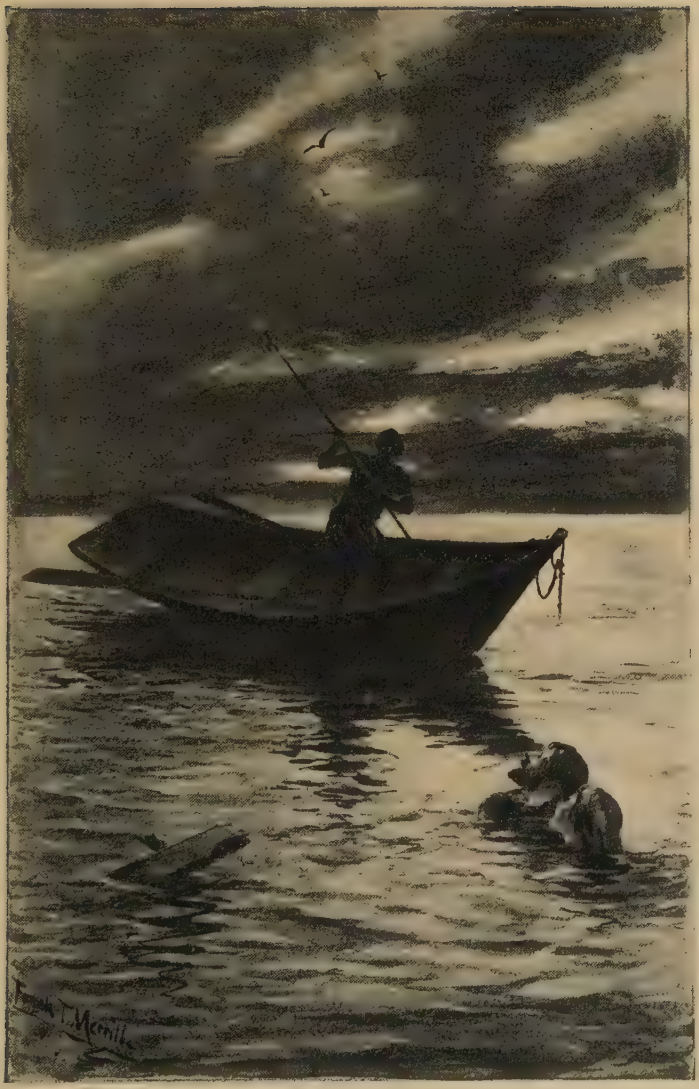
"Heavens," cried the young man, "it is Rémy. Well, I will save him too."

And without stopping to calculate the danger of the additional weight, he seized Rémy by the sleeve, drew him to his left side, and saw him breathe freely.

But just then the horse, exhausted by the triple weight, sank to his neck, then to his eyes, finally his broken legs gave way, and he disappeared entirely.

"We must die," murmured Henry. "My God, take my life; it has been pure. You, madame, receive my soul; it is yours."

Just then Henry felt that Rémy was slipping from him; he



HE TURNED AND SAW RÉMY, WHO HAD JUST REACHED A BOAT.

made no effort to hold him; any resistance would have been useless.

His only thought was to keep the lady above water, so that she might at least be the last to die, and so that he could say to himself at the final moment that he had done all he could to struggle for her against death.

Suddenly, and when he was thinking of nothing more except of dying himself, a cry of joy rose at his side.

He turned and saw Rémy, who had just reached a boat. This boat had belonged to the small house which we have seen removed by the water. The flood had carried it away, and Rémy, who, thanks to the aid which Henry had given him, had recovered his strength, seeing it pass within reach, had left the others, panting, and in two strokes had reached it.

Its oars were fastened to its boarding; a boat hook rolled on the bottom.

He handed the hook to Henry, who took it, dragged the lady with him, raised her above his shoulders and gave her into Rémy's hands. Then, seizing the ledge of the boat, he climbed in after them.

The first rays of the sun were waking, showing the flooded plains and the boat balancing on them like an atom on that ocean covered with débris.

About two hundred feet away to the left rose a small hill entirely surrounded by water, which looked like an island in the middle of the sea.

Henry took the oars and rowed to the hill, towards which, for that matter, the current was already driving them. Rémy took the hook and, standing in the bow, set to work to push aside the planks and timbers, against which the boat might dash. Thanks to his strength and to Rémy's skill, they touched, or rather they were thrown against, the hill.

Rémy sprang ashore, and seized the chain of the boat, which he drew towards him.

Henry advanced to take the lady in his arms, but she gave him her hand, and rising by herself, she stepped ashore.

Henry heaved a sigh; for an instant the idea came to him to throw himself into the water and die before her eyes; but an irresistible feeling held him to life as long as he could see this woman whose presence he had desired so long without ever obtaining it.

He drew the boat ashore, and sat down ten feet from the

lady and Rémy, pale, dripping with water which ran down his clothes, and which was more painful than blood.

They were saved from the most imminent danger, that is from the water; the flood, strong as it was, never rose to the height of the hill.

Below them they could now contemplate the grand wrath of the waves which had no anger above them save that of God. Henry watched the swift water pass, roaring, carrying masses of French corpses, and near them their horses and arms.

Rémy felt an acute pain in his shoulder; a floating plank had struck him at the moment his horse had fallen under him.

His companion, aside from the cold she felt, had no wound; Du Bouchage had secured her against everything which was in his power to guard her against.

Henry was greatly surprised to see that these two beings, so miraculously saved from death, had thanked only him, and that for God, the chief author of their safety, they had not a single word of gratitude.

The young woman was the first to rise: she noticed that at the extremity of the horizon, on the west side, there was to be seen something like fires through the mist.

It goes without saying that these fires were burning on an elevated point which the flood could not reach.

As far as they could judge in the midst of the cold dawn which had succeeded the night, they were about a mile away.

Rémy advanced to the point of the hill facing these fires, and came back and said he thought that almost a thousand feet from the spot where they had landed, there was a kind of jetty which ran in a direct line to the fires.

What made Rémy think it a jetty, or at least a road, was the fact that it was a double line of trees, straight and regular.

Henry, in turn, made his observations, which were found to agree with those of Rémy, and yet in this he had to depend much on chance.

The water, carried down the slope of the plains, had hurled them to the left of their way by making them describe a considerable angle; this turning aside, added to the furious course of the horses, had removed every means of their knowing where they were.

It is true that daylight was appearing, but cloudy and heavy

with mist; in clear weather, and under a pure sky, the steeple of Malines could have been seen, from which they were only about two miles distant.

"Well, count," said Rémy, "what do you think of those fires?"

"Those fires, which seem to announce a hospitable shelter, seem to me suspicious, and I mistrust them."

"Why so?"

"Rémy," said Henry, lowering his voice, "look at all these corpses; all are French, not one is Flemish; they announce a great disaster; the dikes have been broken in order to complete the destruction of the French army if it has been conquered, in order to destroy the effect of its victory if it has been triumphant. Why may not these fires have been lighted by enemies just as well as by friends? or why may they not simply be a ruse to attract fugitives?"

"And yet," said Rémy, "we cannot remain here; the cold and want of food will kill my mistress."

"You are right, Rémy," said the count; "stay here with madame while I go to the jetty, and I will come back and tell you the news."

"No, monsieur," said the lady, "you shall not expose yourself alone. We have been saved together; we will all die together. Rémy, your arm, I am ready."

Every word of this strange creature had an irresistible accent of authority, which no one for a single instant thought of disobeying.

Henry bowed and walked on ahead.

The flood was calmer, the jetty, which ended in the hill, formed a kind of bay in which the water slept. All three stepped into the small boat, which was again launched in the midst of the débris and floating bodies. A quarter of an hour later they landed on the jetty.

They fastened the chain of the boat to the foot of a tree, landed a second time, followed the jetty for almost an hour, and reached a group of Flemish huts, in the midst of which, on a square planted with lime trees, were gathered about a great fire two or three hundred soldiers, above whom were floating the folds of a French flag.

All at once the sentinel stationed at about a hundred feet from the bivouac lighted the match of his musket, crying:

"Who goes there?"

"France," replied Du Bouchage. Then turning towards Diana:

"Now, madame," said he, "you are saved; I recognize the field-colors of the gendarmes of Aunis, a company of noblemen in which I have friends."

At the cry of the sentinel and at the response of the count, some gendarmes ran towards the newcomers, doubly welcome in the midst of this terrible disaster, in the first place because they had survived the disaster, secondly because they were fellow-countrymen.

Henry made himself known personally by mentioning his brother. He was eagerly questioned and related in what a miraculous way he and his companions had escaped death, but said nothing further.

Rémy and his mistress seated themselves in silence in a corner; Henry went to them to ask them to draw near the fire. Both were dripping with water.

"Madame," said he, "you will be as much respected here as in your own house. I took the liberty of saying that you were one of my relatives; pardon me."

And without waiting for the thanks of those whose lives he had saved, Henry withdrew to join the officers who were waiting for him.

Rémy and Diana exchanged a look which had it been seen by the count would have been the thanks so well merited for his courage and delicacy.

The gendarmes of Aunis, of whom our fugitives had just asked hospitality, had retreated in good order after the rout and the panic of the chiefs.

Wherever there is homogeneity of position, identity of sentiment, habit of living together, it is not rare to see spontaneity of execution after unity of thought. This is what happened that night to the gendarmes of Aunis. Seeing their leaders abandon them and the other regiments seeking their safety in various directions, they stared at one another, closed their ranks instead of breaking them, put their horses to the gallop, and under the leadership of one of their ensigns whom they greatly loved on account of his bravery, and whom they respected to an equal degree because of his birth, they set out for Brussels.

Like all the actors of that terrible scene, they saw the whole progress of the flood, and were followed by the furious waters;

but good luck willed that on the way they should come to the town of which we have spoken, a position at once strong against men and the elements. The inhabitants, knowing that they were safe, had not left their houses, except the women, the old men, and the children, who had been sent to the city; so, when the gendarmes of Aunis arrived, they found resistance; but death was raging behind them; they fought like desperate men, conquered every obstacle, lost ten men in the attack of the causeway, but took possession of it and drove away the Flemish.

An hour afterwards the town was entirely surrounded by water, except on the side of the causeway by which we have seen Henry and his companions land. Such was the story that the gendarmes of Aunis told Du Bouchage.

"And the rest of the army?" asked Henry.

"Look," answered the ensign, "at every moment corpses are passing which will answer your question."

"But — but my brother?" ventured Du Bouchage, in a choking voice.

"Alas! count, we are not able to give you certain news of him; he fought like a lion; three times we dragged him from the fight. It is certain that he survived the battle, but as to the flood we cannot say."

Henry lowered his head and was lost in bitter thought; then all at once:

"And the duke," he asked.

The ensign leaned towards Henry, and in a low tone:

"Count," said he, "the duke escaped among the first. He was mounted on a horse which had a white star on its forehead. All at once we saw the horse pass in the midst of a mass of débris; the leg of its rider was caught in the stirrup and was floating on a level with the saddle."

"Good God!" cried Henry.

"Good God!" murmured Rémy, who, having risen at these words of the count, — "and the duke?" — had just heard this story, and glanced quickly at his pale companion.

"Afterwards?" said the count.

"Yes, afterwards?" stammered Rémy.

"Well! in the eddy which the water formed in the corner of the dike, one of my men ventured forth to seize the floating reins of the horse; he reached him and raised the dead animal. Then we saw the white boot and the gold spur

which the duke always wore. But at that instant the water rose as if indignant at seeing its prey snatched from it. My gendarme let go in order not to be dragged down, and everything disappeared. We shall not have even the consolation of giving a Christian burial to our prince."

"Dead! dead! he too, the heir to the throne! What a calamity!"

Rémy turned to his companion, and with an expression impossible to describe:

"He is dead, you see, madame!" said he.

"May the Lord be praised who has saved me from a crime!" replied she, raising her hands and eyes to Heaven in token of gratitude.

"Yes, but He has deprived us of revenge."

"God always has the right to remember. Vengeance belongs to man only when God forgets."

The count saw with a kind of terror this exaltation of the two strange people whom he had saved from death; he watched them from afar and sought in vain to gain some idea of their desires, to note their gestures and the expression of their faces.

The voice of the ensign drew him from his contemplation.

"But you yourself, count," demanded the latter, "what are you going to do?"

The count shuddered.

"I?" said he.

"Yes, you."

"I shall wait here until the body of my brother passes before me," replied the young man in a tone of gloomy despair; "then I will try to draw him to land in order to give him Christian burial, and believe me, once I hold him, I shall not let him go."

These sinister words were overheard by Rémy, and he turned a look full of affectionate reproach on the young man.

As for the lady, after the ensign had announced the death of the Duc d'Anjou, she heard nothing more, for she had begun to pray.

CHAPTER LXXII.

TRANSFIGURATION.

After she had finished praying, Rémy's companion rose so beautiful and so radiant that the count gave a cry of surprise and admiration.

She seemed awakening from a long sleep, the dreams of which had wearied her brain and ruffled the calm of her features, a leaden sleep, which stamps on the damp forehead of the sleeper the chimerical tortures of her dream.

Or rather, she was like the daughter of Jairus, awakened in the midst of her death at the tomb and rising from her funeral couch, already purified and ready for Heaven. The young woman, having come out of this lethargy, glanced about her with a look so sweet, so soft, and gentle, and filled with such angelic goodness, that Henry, credulous like all lovers, thought she was growing tender towards his sufferings, and that at last she would yield to a feeling, if not of kindness, at least of gratitude and pity. While the gendarmes, after their frugal repast, were sleeping here and there among the rubbish; while Rémy himself gave way to sleep, and let his head lean against the beam of a wall against which his bench was propped, Henry sat down beside the young woman, and in a voice so low and so gentle that it seemed a murmur of the breeze:

"Madame," said he, "you live! Oh! let me tell you all the joy with which my heart overflows when I see you here in safety, after having seen you on the threshold of the tomb."

"That is true, monsieur," replied the lady, "I live through you; and," she added with a sad smile, "I wish I could tell you that I am grateful."

"In fact, madame," said Henry, with a sublime effort of love and abnegation, "I saved you only to return you to those whom you love!"

"What are you saying?" asked the lady.

"To those you are about to join through so many perils," added Henry.

"Monsieur, those whom I love are dead, and those whom I was to join are dead also."

"Oh! madame," murmured the young man, falling on his knees, "look at me, on me, who have suffered so deeply, on me, who have loved you so well! Oh! do not turn away; you are young, you are as beautiful as an angel in Heaven. Read in my heart, which I open to you, and you will see that this heart contains not one atom of love as other men understand it. You do not believe me! Think of the past hours; weigh them one by one; which one gave me joy? which one hope? and yet I persisted. You made me weep, I swallowed my tears; you made me suffer, I devoured my grief; you drove me to death, I went to it uncomplaining. Even now, when you turn aside your head, when each of my words, burning as it is, seems a drop of ice water falling on your heart, my soul is full of you, and I live only because you live. Just now was I not about to die with you? What did I ask for? Nothing. Did I touch your hand? Never except to drag you from mortal danger. I held you in my arms to snatch you from the waves, but did you feel the pressure of my breast? No, I am no longer anything but a soul, and everything in me has been purified by the consuming fire of my love."

"Oh! monsieur, for pity's sake do not speak to me in this way."

"For pity's sake too, do not kill me. I have been told that you love no one; oh! repeat this assurance to me; it is a singular favor, is it not, for a man to beg to have himself told that he is not loved? but I prefer that, since at the same time you tell me that you are insensible to all. Oh! madame, madame, you who are the sole adoration of my life, answer me."

In spite of the insistence of Henry, a sigh was the young woman's only reply.

"You tell me nothing," said the count; "Rémy, at least, had more pity for me than you; he strove to console me. Oh! I see, you do not answer me, because you do not want to tell me that you were going to Flanders to join some one happier than I, I, who nevertheless am yours; I, who carry in my life a part of my brother's hopes; I, who am dying at your feet without your having said to me 'I have loved, but I no longer love;' or else 'I love, but I shall cease loving.'"

"Monsieur le Comte," replied the young woman, with a solemn dignity, "do not say to me the things which are said to any woman. I am a creature of another world, and I do not

live in this. Had I seen you less noble, less good, less generous, if at the bottom of my heart I had not had for you the sweet, tender smile of a sister for her brother, I would say to you, 'Rise, Monsieur le Comte, and no longer importune me, for I have a horror of every word of love.' But I am not going to say this to you, Monsieur le Comte, for I suffer in seeing you suffer. I will say more: now that I know you, I will take your hand, I will lay it on my heart, and I will gladly say to you: See, my heart no longer beats; live near me, if you will, and assist day by day, if such is your pleasure, in the sad exemption of a body killed by the tortures of the soul; but this sacrifice which you accept as a happiness, I am sure" —

"Yes! yes!" cried Henry.

"Well, I ought to refuse it. From to-day something has changed in my life. I no longer have the right to lean on any arm in the world, not even on that of the faithful friend, the noble being, who sleeps yonder, and who for an instant is oblivious to happiness! Alas! poor Rémy," she continued, giving to her voice the first inflection of feeling which Henry had noticed in her; "poor Rémy, your awakening also will be sad; you know not the progress of my thoughts, you do not read my eyes, you do not know that when your sleep is over you will be alone on earth, for I must go alone to God."

"What are you saying?" cried Henry; "are you thinking of dying too? You!"

Rémy, awakened by the sad cry of the young count, raised his head and listened.

"You saw me praying, did you not?" continued the young woman.

Henry made an affirmative sigh.

"This prayer was my farewell to earth; the joy which you saw on my face, the joy which now overwhelms me, is the same that you would notice in me were the angel of death to come to me and say: 'Rise, Diana, and follow me to the feet of God!'"

"Diana! Diana!" murmured Henry, "I know your name now — Diana! dear name! adorable name!" — and the wretched man sank at the feet of the young woman, repeating the name in the intoxication of an indescribable happiness.

"Oh! silence," said the young woman, in her solemn voice. "Forget this name which escaped me; no one among the living has a right to wound my heart by uttering it."

"Oh! madame, madame," cried Henry, "now that I know your name, do not tell me that you are going to die."

"I do not say that, monsieur," said the young woman, in her serious voice; "I say that I am going to leave this world of tears, of hatred, of dark passions, of vile interests, and of nameless desires; I say that I have nothing further to do among the creatures whom God has created like me; I no longer have tears in my eyes; the blood no longer beats in my heart; not a single thought has revolved in my brain since the thought that wholly filled it died; I am no longer anything but a worthless victim, since I sacrifice nothing, neither desire nor hopes, by renouncing the world; but such as I am, I offer myself to God; He will take me in pity, I trust, He who has made me suffer so deeply, and who has not been willing for me to succumb to my grief."

Rémy, who had overheard these words, rose slowly and went straight to his mistress.

"You are going to leave me?" he asked in a gloomy tone.

"For God," replied Diana, raising towards Heaven her pale, emaciated hand, resembling that of the sublime Magdalene.

"That is true!" replied Rémy, letting his head fall forward on his breast; "that is true!"

And as Diana dropped her hand, he took it between both of his and pressed it to his breast as he would have done to the relic of a saint.

"Oh! what am I before these two hearts," sighed the young man, with a shudder of fear.

"You are the only living being," said Diana, "at whom I have looked twice since I condemned my eyes to be forever closed."

Henry knelt down.

"Thank you, madame," said he, "you have just revealed yourself to me wholly; I see my destiny clearly; from this moment not one word from my lips, not a hope or an aspiration of my heart shall betray in me the one you love. You belong to the Lord, madame, and I am not jealous of God."

He had just finished speaking and had risen, filled with the regenerating charm which accompanies every great and strong resolution, when from the plain, still covered with mists, which each moment were lifting, there came the sound of distant trumpets.

The gendarmes sprang to their arms and were on their horses before the command had been given.

Henry listened.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" cried he, "those are the trumpets of the admiral; I recognize them, I recognize them; my God, may they announce my brother!"

"You see very well that you still want something," said Diana, "and that you still love some one. Why, then, my friend, should you choose despair, like those who desire nothing further, like those who love no one?"

"A horse!" cried Henry, "will some one lend me a horse?"

"But where are you going," asked the ensign, "since the water surrounds us on all sides?"

"You see the plain can be crossed; you see that they must be marching, since their trumpets sound."

"Ride up to the causeway, Monsieur le Comte," replied the ensign, "the weather is clearing, and perhaps you will be able to see."

"I will go," said the young man.

In fact, Henry rode towards the eminence indicated by the ensign; the trumpets still sounded at intervals, without either coming nearer or going away.

Rémy resumed his seat near Diana.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE TWO BROTHERS.

A QUARTER of an hour later Henry returned. He, as well as every one else, had seen on the hill that which the night prevented them from seeing — a considerable detachment of French troops cantonned and entrenched. With the exception of a wide ditch of water which surrounded the town occupied by the gendarmes of Aunis, the plain, like a pond which is emptied, was beginning to grow clear, the natural slope of the land drew off the waters toward the sea, and several points more elevated than the others began to reappear, as after a deluge.

The muddy slime of the running water had covered the entire country, and, as the wind lifted the veil of mist stretched over the plain, it was a sad sight to see some fifty horsemen stuck in the mud, and vainly striving to reach either the town or the hill. From the latter their cries of distress

had been heard, and that is why the trumpets were sounding incessantly.

As soon as the wind had succeeded in chasing away the fog, Henry perceived on the hill the flag of France floating proudly in the breeze. The gendarmes on their side hoisted the pennant of Aunis, and from both sides were heard musket-shots fired in token of joy.

Towards eleven o'clock the sun shone out upon this scene of desolation, drying up some parts of the plain, and making practicable a sort of route of communication.

Henry, who had tried this route, was the first to perceive from the sound of his horse's hoofs that by making a circular turn, a paved road led from the town to the hill; he concluded from this that the horses would sink in the mud above their hoofs, to the middle of their legs, perhaps to their breasts, but no farther, sustained as they would be by the solid foundation of the soil.

He asked to put this to proof, and as no one offered to accompany him in the dangerous undertaking, he put Rémy and his companion in care of the ensign, and ventured forth on the perilous road.

Just as he left the town a horseman was seen descending the hill, and, like Henry, trying on his side to set out towards the town.

The whole slope of the hill which faced the town was covered with anxious soldiers, who raised their arms to Heaven, and seemed trying to stop the imprudent horsemen by their supplications.

The two deputies of these two fragments of the great French army went their way bravely, and soon they saw that their task was less difficult than they had feared, and especially than had been feared for them. A wide stream of water, which had escaped from an aqueduct dug by the fall of a beam, issued forth below the mud and, as though designedly, washed the miry causeway, showing under its limpid waves the bottom of a ditch sought by the active feet of the horses. The horsemen were no more than two hundred feet from each other.

"France!" cried the one coming from the hill.

And he raised his cap shaded by a white plume.

"Oh! is it you?" exclaimed Henry, with a great cry of joy, "you, my lord?"

"You, Henry! you, brother!" exclaimed the other.

And at the risk of swerving to the right or the left, the two horses set off at a gallop towards each other, and soon, amid the frantic shouts of the spectators on the causeway and the hill, the two riders embraced long and tenderly.

At once the town and the hill became depopulated; gendarmes and light horse, Huguenot gentlemen and Catholics, hastened along the road opened by the two brothers.

Before long both camps were joined, arms were opened, and on the road where all thought they would meet death, three thousand French gave thanks to Heaven and cried, "Long live France!"

"Gentlemen," said the voice of a Huguenot gentleman suddenly, "we must shout 'Long live the Admiral!' for it is to Monsieur le Duc de Joyeuse and no other that we owe our lives to-night, and this morning the joy of embracing our countrymen."

A great shout followed these words.

The two brothers exchanged a few words with tears; then the first spoke.

"And the duke?" asked Joyeuse of Henry.

"He is dead, it seems," replied the latter.

"Is the news authentic?"

"The gendarmes of Aunis saw his horse drowned, and recognized him. The horse was still dragging in his stirrup a rider whose head was under water."

"This is a sad day for France," said the admiral.

Then turning to his men:

"Come, gentlemen," said he aloud, "let us not lose time. Once the water has subsided, we shall very probably be attacked. Let us entrench ourselves until news and provisions reach us."

"But, monseigneur," replied a voice, "the cavalry cannot march; the horses have eaten nothing since four o'clock yesterday, and the poor beasts are dying of hunger."

"There is some corn in our camp," said the ensign; "but what shall we do for the men?"

"Well!" said the admiral, "if there is corn, it is all I ask; the men shall live like the horses."

"Brother," interrupted Henry, "try, I beg you, to let me have a moment's talk with you."

"I am going to occupy the town," replied Joyeuse; "choose some lodging for me and wait for me there."

Henry went back to his two companions.

"Here you are in the midst of an army," said he to Rémy; "believe me, you must hide in some lodging which I will find. It is not right for madame to be seen by every one. This evening, when every one has gone to sleep, I will suggest a way to set you free."

Rémy therefore with Diana installed himself in the lodging which was given him by the ensign of the gendarmes, who, on the arrival of Joyeuse, at the orders of the latter, had become a simple soldier again.

Towards two o'clock the Duc de Joyeuse entered the town, amid the sound of trumpets, quartered his troops, and gave strict orders that all disorder should be avoided.

Then he made a distribution of barley to the men, oats to the horses, and water to every one, gave to the wounded some barrels of beer and wine which were found in cellars, and himself, as he made his round of inspection in sight of all, dined on a piece of black bread and a glass of water. Everywhere he was received like a savior, with shouts of love and gratitude.

"Well, well," said he, on his return, finding himself alone with his brother, "let the Flemish come, and I will fight them; and, good God, if this continues, I will even eat them, for I am half-starved, and," he added in a low tone to Henry, throwing into a corner his bread, which he had appeared to eat with such relish, "that is execrable food!"

Then flinging his arms around his brother's neck:

"Ah! now, my friend, let us talk, and tell me why you are in Flanders, when I thought you in Paris."

"Brother," said Henry to the admiral, "life became unbearable in Paris, and I set out to find you in Flanders."

"Still from love?" asked Joyeuse.

"No; from despair. Now, I swear to you, Anne, I am no longer in love; my passion is madness."

"Brother, brother," cried Joyeuse, "permit me to say to you that you have fallen in with a wretched woman."

"How so?"

"Yes, Henry, it happens that beyond a certain degree of wickedness or virtue, human beings overstep the will of the Creator, and become hangmen and homicides, whom the Church equally disapproves of; so being too virtuous to pay attention to the sufferings of others is barbarous exaltation and lack of Christian charity."

"Oh! brother, brother," cried Henry, "do not calumniate virtue!"

"Oh! I am not calumniating virtue, Henry; I am assuring vice, that is all. Therefore I repeat, this woman is a bad woman, and possession of her, desirable as it may be, would never be worth the torments she makes you suffer. Well! my God! it is in such a case that we should use our strength and power; for we defend ourselves legitimately instead of attacking. By the devil, Henry, I well know that in your place I should have taken this woman's house by storm; I should have taken her herself in the same way as I took her house, and then when, according to the habit of every tamed creature, who becomes as humble before her conqueror as she has been fierce before the struggle, when she came and threw her arms about my neck, saying to me, 'Henry, I adore you!' I should repulse her, and answer, 'You do well, madame; it is your turn. I have suffered enough for you to suffer also.'"

Henry seized his brother's hand.

"You do not believe one word of what you have been saying," said he.

"Yes, on my honor."

"You, so good, so generous!"

"Generosity towards people without heart is trickery, brother."

"Oh! Joyeuse, Joyeuse, you do not know this woman."

"A thousand demons! I do not want to know her."

"Why not?"

"Because she would make me commit what others would call a crime, but which I myself would call an act of justice."

"Oh! my good brother," said the young man, with an angelic smile, "how happy you are in not loving! But, if you please, Monseigneur l'Admiral, let us leave my foolish love-affair, and talk about the war."

"Very good, for in speaking of your madness you make me mad."

"You see that we lack food."

"I know it, and I have already thought of a way of procuring some."

"And you have found it?"

"I think so."

"What is your plan?"

"I cannot stir from here before receiving news of the army,

since this position is good, and I can defend it against five-fold forces; but I can send out a company of scouts; they will first find the news, which is the real life of men reduced to our present situation; next, food, for in truth, this Flanders is a fine country."

"Not very, brother, not very."

"Oh! I am speaking only of the earth as God made it, and not of the men, who always spoil the work of God. Do you know, Henry, what foolishness this prince has committed, what part he lost? how pride and precipitation quickly ruined him, this unfortunate Francis? — God has his soul, let us speak no more about it; but truly he could have won immortal glory, and one of the most beautiful kingdoms of Europe, while he has been attending to the affairs of whom? — of William the Silent. For that matter, do you know, Henry, that the Antwerpers fought bravely?"

"And you too, according to what people say, brother."

"Yes, I had one of my lucky days, and then there was something which inspired me."

"What?"

"I met on the battlefield a swordsman of my acquaintance."

"A Frenchman?"

"A Frenchman."

"In the Flemish ranks?"

"At their head. Henry, here is a secret which must be known as the sequel to the execution of Salcède on the Place de Grève."

"And now, dear brother, here you are back again, safe and sound, to my great joy; but I have as yet done nothing and must do something now."

"What do you want to do?"

"Give me the command of your scouts, I beg you."

"No, that is really too dangerous, Henry; I would not use this word before strangers, but I do not wish to make you die an obscure death, and consequently an ugly death. The scouts might meet a company of those villanous Flemish who fight with scythes and flails; you might kill a thousand of them; there would still remain one, one who would cut you in two or disfigure you. No, Henry, no, if you absolutely insist upon dying I can give you something better than that."

"Brother, give me what I ask, I beg you; I will take all possible precaution and I promise I will return."

"Ah! I understand."

"What do you understand?"

"You wish to try if the noise of some brilliant action will not soften the heart of this obstinate woman. Acknowledge that this is what makes you so insistent."

"I will admit it, if you wish, brother."

"So be it, you are right. Women who resist a great love sometimes yield to a little noise."

"I do not hope for that."

"Triple fool that you are, then, if you do it without this hope."

"Stop, Henry, do not seek any other reason for the refusal of this woman unless she is a capricious individual who has neither eyes nor heart."

"You give me this command, do you not, brother?"

"I must, since you wish it."

"I may leave this very night?"

"That is imperative, Henry; you understand we cannot wait any longer."

"How many men will you place at my disposal?"

"One hundred, no more. I cannot weaken my position, Henry. You readily understand that."

"Fewer, if you wish, brother."

"No, for I should like to be able to give you double that number. Only give me your word of honor that if you encounter more than three hundred men you will beat a retreat instead of letting yourself be killed."

"Brother," said Henry, smiling, "you are selling dearly a glory which you will not give me."

"Then, my dear Henry, I will neither sell it nor give it to you; another officer shall command the reconnoitring party."

"Brother, give your orders and I will execute them."

"You will fight, then, only against forces equal, double, or triple, but you will not go beyond that?"

"I swear it."

"Very well; now what men do you want?"

"Let me take a hundred men from the gendarmes of Aunis; I have quite a number of friends in this regiment, and in choosing my men I can do as I please with them."

"Agreed, then, as to the gendarmes of Aunis."

"When shall I leave?"

"At once. You will have rations given to your men for one

day, to the horses for two. Remember that I wish to have prompt and sure reports."

"I leave, brother; have you any secret order?"

"Do not spread abroad the death of the duke; let it be supposed that he is in my camp. Exaggerate the number of my forces, and if you find the body of the prince, although he may have been a bad man and a poor general, nevertheless, he belonged to the house of France, so have him put into an oak coffin and sent back by your gendarmes, in order that he may be buried in Saint Denis."

"Very well, brother; is this all?"

"All."

Henry took the hand of his elder brother to kiss it, but the latter clasped him in his arms.

"Once again, promise me, Henry," said Joyeuse, "that this is not a deception you are practising in order to win a brave death."

"Brother, I had that idea in coming to join you; but I swear I no longer have the thought."

"When did it leave you?"

"Two hours ago."

"Why?"

"Brother, excuse me."

"Very well, Henry, very well, your secrets are your own."

"Oh! how good you are, brother!"

And the young men fell a second time into each other's arms, and separated, but not without again looking back at each other, not without smiling and waving their hands.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE EXPEDITION.

Henry, transported with joy, hastened to join Diana and Rémy.

"Be ready in a quarter of an hour," said he to them, "for we are to start. You will find two horses already saddled at the door of the small wooden stairway which leads to this corridor; mingle with our men, and say nothing."

Then appearing on the balcony which went around the house:

"Trumpets of the gendarmes!" cried he, "sound the signal to saddle!"

At once the call resounded through the town, and the ensign and his soldiers ranged themselves in front of the house.

Their men came behind them with a few mules and two wagons. According to the advice given them, Rémy and his companion slipped in among them.

"Gendarmes," said Henry, "my brother, the admiral, has temporarily given me the command of your company, and has charged me to go reconnoitring; one hundred of you are to accompany me; the mission is a dangerous one, but it is for the safety of all that we march forward. What men will volunteer?"

The three hundred men came forward.

"Gentlemen," said Henry, "I thank you all; it has been justly said that you were the flower of the army, but I do not wish to make a choice, chance must decide. Monsieur," continued Henry, addressing the ensign, "draw lots, I beg of you."

During this operation, Joyeuse gave his final instructions to his brother.

"Listen, Henry," said he, "the country is drying up; according to the peasants, there must be a communication between Conticq and Rupelmonde; you will march between two rivers, the Rupel and the Scheldt; for the Scheldt, you will find before Rupelmonde some boats brought from Antwerp; the Rupel it is not necessary to cross. Moreover, I hope you will not need to go as far as Rupelmonde to find storehouses and mills."

At these words Henry started to go.

"Wait a moment," said Joyeuse to him, "you forget the principal thing; my men have taken three peasants, I will give you one of them for a guide. No false pity; at the first approach of treason, a pistol-shot or the thrust of a dagger."

This last point decided on, he embraced his brother tenderly, and gave orders to start.

The hundred men drawn by lot by the ensign, with Du Bouchage at their head, at once set out.

Henry placed the guide between two gendarmes who held revolvers in their hands. Rémy and his companion mingled with the others.

Henry had made no suggestion in regard to them, thinking

that curiosity about them was already sufficiently excited without augmenting it still more by precautions more dangerous than helpful.

He himself without having wearied or importuned his hosts by a single glance, on leaving the town took his place at the side of the company. The troop marched slowly, for every now and then the road would give way unexpectedly beneath the feet of the horses, and the entire detachment would find themselves in the mire. As long as they could not find the road for which they were looking, they had to resign themselves to marching as if they were in trammels.

Occasional spectres, fleeing at the sound of the horses, crossed the plain; they were peasants returning somewhat too early to their homes, afraid of falling into the hands of the enemy they had striven to annihilate. Sometimes too, they were only unhappy Frenchmen, half dead from cold and hunger, incapable of struggling against armed men, and who in the uncertainty as to whether they were falling into the hands of friend or foe, preferred to wait for daylight before resuming their painful journey.

They made two leagues in three hours; these two leagues brought the adventurous party to the banks of the Rupel, along which ran a stone road; but then danger succeeded difficulty; two or three horses lost footing in the crevices of the stones, or slipped on the muddy pavement, and with their riders, rolled into the still rapid current of the river. More than once, a boat anchored to the opposite shore fired some shots which wounded two army servants and one gendarme. One of the two servants had been wounded at the side of Diana; she had felt pity for the man, but no fear for herself. Under these varying circumstances, Henry showed himself to be a worthy captain for his men and a true friend; he rode at the head, forcing the entire troop to follow in his steps, and trusting less to his own shrewdness than to the instinct of the horses his brother had given him; in this way he led the entire company in safety, he alone risking death. Three leagues from Rupelmonde the gendarmes met half a dozen French soldiers crouching before a peat fire; the wretched men were cooking a quarter of horse flesh, the only food they had had for two days.

The approach of the gendarmes caused great excitement among the guests of the sad feast. Two or three arose as if to

flee; but one of them remained seated, and restrained the others, saying:

"Well! if they are enemies they will kill us, and the affair will be over at once."

"France! France!" cried Henry, who had overheard the words; "come to us, you poor fellows."

The men, recognizing countrymen, ran to them. Cloaks were given them, and a glass of gin. Furthermore, permission was granted them to mount behind the servants. In this way they followed the detachment. Half a mile further on they came upon four light-horse with one horse among them. They were received in the same way.

At length they reached the banks of the Scheldt. The night was dark; the gendarmes found two men there, who, in bad Flemish, were trying to get a boatman to row them to the opposite shore. The man was refusing, with threats. The ensign spoke Dutch, and advanced gently at the head of his men. While the column halted, he overheard these words:

"You are French; you must die; you cannot pass."

One of the two men held a dagger to his throat, and without taking the trouble of trying to address him in his own language, said in excellent French:

"It is you who must die, Flemish that you are, if you do not let us pass at once."

"Stand firm, monsieur, stand firm!" cried the ensign; "in five minutes we shall be with you."

But during the movement the two Frenchmen had made on hearing these words, the boatman unfastened the knot which held his boat to the bank, and disappeared rapidly, leaving the others on the shore.

One of the gendarmes, however, realizing of what use the boat might be, entered the river on his horse, and killed the boatman with a shot from his pistol.

The boat, without a guide, turned round of its own accord; and as it had not reached the middle of the river, the eddy drove it back to shore. The two men took possession of it as soon as it touched the bank, and sat down in it. This haste on their part to get away surprised the ensign.

"Well, gentlemen, who are you, if you please?"

"Monsieur, we are officers in the marine regiment, and you are gendarmes from Aunis, apparently?"

"Yes, gentlemen, and very glad to have been of use to you; will you not accompany us?"

"Willingly, gentlemen."

"Get into the wagons, then, if you are too tired to walk."

"May I ask where you are going?" said the one of the two marine officers who had not yet spoken.

"Monsieur, our orders are to push on as far as Rupelmonde."

"Be careful," went on the same speaker; "we did not cross the river earlier, because this morning a troop of Spaniards passed on their way from Antwerp; at sunset we thought we might venture across. Two men do not arouse suspicion, but you, a whole company" —

"That is true," said the ensign, "I will speak to our chief."

He called Henry, who approached and asked what was the matter.

"It seems," replied the ensign, "that these gentlemen met a troop of Spaniards this morning following the same road as ourselves."

"How many were there?" asked Henry.

"Fifty or so."

"Well! and is this what stops you?"

"No, Monsieur le Comte; and yet I think it would be wise to make sure of the boat, at any cost; twenty men can make a stand, and if it were necessary to cross the river, in five trips and by leading our horses, the operation would be accomplished."

"That is well," said Henry, "let them keep the boat; there must be some houses at the junction of the Rupel and the Scheldt."

"There is a village," said a voice.

"Let us go there, the angle formed by the junction of the two rivers is a good position. Gendarmes, forward! Let two men descend the river with the boat while we march along the shore."

"We will direct the boat," said one of the two officers, "if you wish it."

"Very good, gentlemen," said Henry, "but do not lose sight of us, and join us as soon as we reach the village."

"But if we abandon the boat, and it is taken away from us?"

"A hundred feet from the village you will find a post of ten men, to whom you will deliver it."

"Very well," said the marine officer.

And with a vigorous stroke of the oars he left the bank.

"That is strange," said Henry, resuming his march, "I know that voice."

An hour later he found the village guarded by the troop of Spaniards of whom the officer had spoken; surprised when they least expected it, they made but little resistance.

Henry disarmed the prisoners, put them into the strongest house of the village, and placed a post of ten men to guard it; another post of ten men was sent to look after the boat; ten other men were scattered as sentinels at various points, with the promise of being relieved at the end of an hour. Henry then decided that they should sup in parties of twenty, in the house opposite the one in which the Spanish prisoners were confined. The supper for the first fifty or sixty was ready; it was that of the post they had just captured.

Henry chose a room on the first floor for Diana and Rémy, whom he did not wish to have sup with the rest. He placed the ensign and seventeen men at table, and charged him to ask to supper the two marine officers, guardians of the boat.

Then before sitting down himself he visited the men in their various positions.

At the end of half an hour Henry returned. This half hour had sufficed for him to make sure of lodging and food for all his men, and to give the necessary orders in case of a surprise from the Hollanders. The officers, in spite of his request not to be anxious about him, had waited for him before beginning the meal; but they had taken their seats at table and some of them were so weary that they had fallen asleep in their chairs.

The entrance of the count awakened the sleepers, and caused all to rise. Henry glanced around the room.

Brass lamps, suspended from the ceiling, gave out a smoky and almost dense light.

The table, covered with cheese, bread, and pork, with a mug of fresh beer for each man, would have had an appetizing appearance even for men who for twenty-four hours had lacked nothing whatever. They pointed out to Henry the seat of honor.

Henry took it.

"Eat, gentlemen," said he.

As soon as this permission was given, the sound of the

knives and forks on the china plates proved that it had been waited for with a certain impatience and received with supreme satisfaction.

"By the way," asked Henry of the ensign, "did you find our two marine officers?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Where are they?"

"Yonder, at the foot of the table."

Not only were they seated at the further end of the table, but in the darkest part of the room.

"Gentlemen," said Henry, "you have poor seats, and you are not eating, apparently."

"Thanks, count," replied one of them, "we are very tired, and, as a matter of fact, we have greater need of sleep than of food; we have already said this to your officers, but they insisted, saying that you had given orders for us to have supper with you. This is a great honor, and we thoroughly appreciate it. Nevertheless, if instead of detaining us longer you would be good enough to have a room given us" —

Henry had listened with the greatest attention, but it was evident that it was the voice rather than the words which he heard.

"This is the wish of your companion, also?" asked Henry when the marine officer had finished speaking. He glanced so closely at the companion, who kept his hat pulled down over his eyes, and obstinately refused to utter a word, that several of the guests began to look at him also.

The latter, forced to reply to the count's question, uttered these two words in an almost unintelligible manner:

"Yes, count."

The young man gave a start. Rising, he walked straight to the end of the table, while those present followed his movements and the manifestation of his evident astonishment with singular attention.

He stopped near the two officers.

"Monsieur," said he to the one who had first spoken, "will you do me a favor?"

"What, Monsieur le Comte?"

"Assure me that you are not the brother of Monsieur Aurilly, or perhaps Monsieur Aurilly himself."

"Aurilly!" cried all the guests.

"And will your companion," continued Henry, "be kind

enough to raise his hat which hides his face? Otherwise I shall call him monseigneur, and bow before him."

And, hat in hand, Henry saluted the stranger respectfully. The latter raised his head.

"Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou!" cried the officers.

"The duke alive!"

"Faith, gentlemen," said the officer, "since you want to recognize your conquered and fugitive prince, I will no longer resist the manifestation, for which I thank you; you are not mistaken, gentlemen, I am indeed the Duc d'Anjou."

"Long live monseigneur!" cried the officers.

CHAPTER LXXV.

PAULUS ÆMILIUS.

All these acclamations, although sincere, startled the prince.

"Silence! silence, gentlemen!" said he; "do not be happier than I am, I beg you, at the good luck which has come to me. I am enchanted at not being dead, I entreat you to believe, and yet if you had not recognized me I should not have been the first to boast of being alive."

"What! monseigneur," said Henry; "you recognized me? you found yourself in the midst of a troop of French, you saw us frantic over your loss, and you let us feel grief on account of it?"

"Gentlemen," replied the prince, "besides a number of reasons which made me desire to preserve my incognito, I admit that since I was supposed to be dead, I should not have been sorry for this opportunity, which probably would not have arisen in my lifetime, to know something of the funeral oration which would be pronounced over my tomb."

"Monseigneur! monseigneur!"

"No, truly," went on the duke, "I am a man like Alexander of Macedon; I wage war in an artistic manner, and I take pride in it, like every artist. Well! without vanity, I believe I made a mistake."

"Monseigneur," said Henry, lowering his eyes, "do not say such things, I beg you."

"Why not? There is no one but the pope who is infallible,

and since Boniface VIII., even this infallibility has been greatly discussed."

"See to what you would have exposed yourself, monseigneur, had one of us ventured to give his opinion on this expedition, and if this advice had been to blame."

"Well! why not? Do you think that I have not already sufficiently blamed myself, not for having engaged in battle, but for having lost it?"

"Monseigneur, this kindness frightens us, and if your highness will allow me to say so, your gayety is not natural. Will your highness have the goodness to reassure us by telling us that you do not suffer?"

A terrible cloud passed over the brow of the prince, covering it, already so dark, with a sinister veil.

"No," said he, "no. I never felt better, thank God, than at present, and I am very happy in the midst of you all."

The officers bowed.

"How many men are under your command, Du Bouchage?" asked the duke.

"One hundred and fifty, monseigneur."

"Ah! Ah! one hundred and fifty to twelve thousand was the proportion of the battle of Cannæ, gentlemen. They will send a bushel of your rings to Antwerp, but I doubt if the Flemish beauties can use them, unless they have their fingers tapered with the knives of their husbands; they cut well, those knives!"

"Monseigneur," said Du Bouchage, "if our battle is a battle of Cannæ, we are more fortunate than the Romans, for we have saved our Paulus Æmilius."

"On my soul, gentlemen," said the duke, "the Paulus Æmilius of Antwerp is Joyeuse, and, no doubt, to carry the resemblance with its heroic model to the end, your brother is dead, is he not, Du Bouchage?"

Henry felt his heart torn by this cold question.

"No monseigneur," he replied, "he is alive."

"Ah! so much the better," said the duke, with his icy smile. "So our brave Joyeuse has survived! Where is he that I may embrace him?"

"He is not here, monseigneur."

"Ah, yes, wounded?"

"No, monseigneur, safe and sound."

"But a fugitive like myself, wandering, hungry, a poor and

discreditable warrior, alas! The proverb is right: 'For glory the sword; after the sword, blood; after blood, tears.'"

"Monseigneur, I was ignorant of the proverb, but in spite of it, I am glad to inform your highness that my brother had the good fortune to save three thousand men, with whom he is occupying a large town seven miles from here, and such as your highness sees me, I am marching as scout for his army."

The duke turned pale.

"Three thousand men!" said he, "and it is Joyeuse who saved these three thousand men? Do you know, your brother is a Xenophon! By Heaven! it is very fortunate that my brother sent me yours; otherwise I should be returning to France all alone. Long live Joyeuse, by Heaven! Deuce take the house of Valois! Faith, it cannot take for motto *Hilariter*."

"Monseigneur! oh, monseigneur!" murmured Du Bouchage, overwhelmed with grief, seeing that this hilarity of the prince hid a morbid and painful jealousy.

"No, on my soul, I speak the truth, do I not, Aurilly? We return to France like Francis I. after the battle of Pavia. Everything is lost, honor most of all! Ah! ah! ah! I have found the motto for the house of France!"

A gloomy silence followed this laughter as heartbreaking as if it had been sobs.

"Monseigneur," interrupted Henry, "tell me how the tutelary god of France saved your highness."

"Well! my dear count, it is very simple: the tutelary god of France was evidently occupied with something more important at that moment, so I escaped by myself."

"How so, monseigneur?"

"Why, by running away!"

Not a smile followed this joke, which the duke would certainly have punished with death, had it been made by any one but himself.

"Yes, yes, that is the word. My, how we ran!" he continued, "did we not, my brave Aurilly?"

"Every one," said Henry, "realizes the cool bravery and the military genius of your highness; therefore we beg you not to break our hearts by assuming faults which you have not. The best general is not invincible, and Hannibal himself was conquered at Zama."

"Yes," replied the duke, "but Hannibal had won the battles

of Trebia, Trasimene, and Cannæ; while as to me, I have won only that of Cateau Cambrésis; it is not enough, truly, to sustain the comparison."

"But monseigneur jokes when he says he fled?"

"No! by Heaven! I do not joke. Besides, do you find anything in it to joke about, Du Bouchage?"

"Could we have done otherwise, count?" said Aurilly, thinking that it was time to come to the assistance of his master.

"Keep still, Aurilly," said the duke; "ask the shade of Saint Aignan if we could not have kept from running away?"

Aurilly lowered his head.

"Ah! you do not know the story of Saint Aignan, it is true; I will tell it to you in three grimaces."

At this reference, which was especially revolting under the circumstances, the officers frowned, without caring whether they displeased their chief or not.

"Know, gentlemen," said the prince, without in the least appearing to notice this sign of disapproval, "know that just as the battle was declared lost, he gathered together five hundred horses, and, instead of running away like every one, he came to me and said: 'We must attack, monseigneur.' 'What, attack?' I replied; 'you are mad, Saint Aignan, they are a hundred against one.' 'Were they a thousand,' he replied, with his frightful grimace, 'I should attack.' 'Attack, my dear fellow, attack,' I replied; 'I, on the contrary will not attack.' 'Then you will give me your horse, which can no longer hold out, and you will take mine, which is fresh; as I shall not run, any horse will do for me.' And he took my white horse, and gave me his black one, saying: 'Prince, here is a courser which will make twenty leagues in four hours, if you wish.' Then turning to his men: 'Come, gentlemen,' said he, 'follow me; forward, those who do not wish to run away!' And he spurred his horse towards the enemy with a second grimace more hideous than the first. He thought he would find men, he found water; I had foreseen the event. Saint Aignan and his Paladins remained. Had he listened to me, instead of performing that useless feat of valor, we should have him at this table, and he would now be making a third grimace probably even uglier than the first two."

A shudder of horror ran through the circle of those present.

"This wretch has no heart," thought Henry. "Oh! why do his misfortune, his shame, and above all his birth, protect

him against the words we should take so much pleasure in saying to him?"

"Gentlemen," said Aurilly in a low voice, for he felt the terrible effect produced among that gathering of brave men by the words of the prince; "you see how affected monseigneur is; pay no attention to his words, therefore; since the trouble which has come to him, I really believe he has moments of delirium."

"And that," said the prince, emptying his glass, "is how Saint Aignan died and how I lived; for the rest, in dying, he rendered me a last service; he made people believe, as he rode my horse, that it was I who had died, so that this rumor spread, not only through the French army, but through the Flemish army as well, which then gave up its pursuit of me. But reassure yourselves, gentlemen, our good Flemish will not always be able to boast of the affair; we will have our revenge, gentlemen, and a bloody one; since yesterday I have organized, mentally at least, the most formidable army that ever existed."

"In the meantime, monseigneur," said Henry, "your highness will take command of my men; it no longer belongs to me, a simple gentleman, to give a single order where there is a son of France."

"Very well," said the prince, "and I will begin by ordering every one to sup, and you especially, Monsieur du Bouchage, for you have not even touched your plate."

"Monseigneur, I am not hungry."

"In that case, Du Bouchage, my friend, go and visit the posts. Announce to the chiefs that I am living, but beg them not to rejoice too openly over it, before we have gained a better citadel or rejoined the corps of the army of our invincible Joyeuse, for I confess that I care less than ever to be captured now that I have escaped fire and water."

"Monseigneur, your highness shall be carefully obeyed, and no one except these gentlemen shall know that you have done us the honor of remaining with us."

"And these gentlemen will keep my secret?" asked the duke.

Every one bowed.

"Pay your visits now, count."

Du Bouchage left the room.

As we see, it took but an instant for this vagabond, this

fugitive, this conquered man, to become proud, careless, and imperious again.

To command a hundred or a hundred thousand men was nevertheless to command; the Duc d'Anjou would have done the same with Joyeuse. Princes never demand what they think they deserve, but what they believe to be their right.

While Du Bouchage was carrying out the order, all the more promptly as he wished to seem to obey less from spite, Francis asked questions, and Aurilly, the shadow of the master, who followed his every movement, did likewise. The duke thought it surprising that a man of the name and rank of Du Bouchage should have consented to take the command of a handful of men, and take charge of so dangerous an expedition. It was, indeed, the post of a simple ensign, and not that of the brother of a grand admiral. With the prince everything looked suspicious, and every suspicion had to be explained away. He persisted, therefore, and learned that the grand admiral, in placing his brother at the head of the reconnoitring party, had only yielded to his urgent entreaty.

The one who gave this information to the duke and who gave it without any evil intention was the ensign of the gendarmes of Aunis, who had received Du Bouchage, and had seen his own command removed from him, as Du Bouchage had just seen his taken away by the duke.

The prince thought he saw a slight feeling of irritation in the heart of the ensign against Du Bouchage; that is why he questioned him particularly.

"But," demanded the prince, "what was the count's reason for asking so urgently for such a trifling command?"

"In the first place to render a service to the army," said the ensign, "and this feeling I do not doubt."

"In the first place, you said; what is *next*, monsieur?"

"Ah! monseigneur," said the ensign, "I do not know."

"You are either deceiving me or yourself, monsieur, for you certainly know."

"Monseigneur, even to your highness I can give only the reasons connected with my service."

"You see, gentlemen," said the prince, turning to the officers seated at table, "I was perfectly right in trying to hide, since there are secrets in my army from which I am excluded."

"Ah! monseigneur," exclaimed the ensign, "your highness

does not fully understand my discretion; there are secrets only in that which concerns Monsieur du Bouchage: perhaps, for instance, while serving the general interest, Monsieur Henry may have wanted to do a favor to some relative or friend, by escorting him."

"Who among us is a relative or friend of the count? Let him speak that I may embrace him; come!"

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, mingling in the conversation with that respectful familiarity to which he was accustomed, "monseigneur, I have just discovered a part of the secret, and there is nothing in it to make your highness distrustful. This relative whom Monsieur du Bouchage wished to escort, well" —

"Well?" said the prince; "finish, Aurilly."

"Well, monseigneur, it is a woman."

"Ah! Ah! Ah!" cried the duke. "Why did they not tell me the thing frankly? This dear Henry! Why! it is perfectly natural — Come, come, let us shut our eyes to the woman, and speak no more of her."

"Your highness will do all the better," said Aurilly, "as the thing is most mysterious."

"How so?"

"Yes, the lady, like the celebrated Bradamantile whose story I have sung to your highness twenty times, the lady is disguised in man's clothes."

"Oh! monseigneur," said the ensign, "I beg you: Monsieur Henry seemed to me to have great respect for this lady; and in all probability would be angry at any indiscretion."

"No doubt, no doubt, monsieur, we shall be as silent as the tomb, you may be sure, as mute as poor Saint Aignan; moreover, if we see the lady, we will try not to make grimaces at her — Ah! Henry has a relative with him, in the midst of the gendarmes. Where is she, Aurilly, this relation?"

"Upstairs."

"What! upstairs, in this very house?"

"Yes, monseigneur; but hush! Here comes Monsieur du Bouchage."

"Yes, hush!" repeated the prince, bursting into laughter.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

A MEMORY OF THE DUC D'ANJOU.

On entering, the young man heard the fatal laugh of the prince; but he had not lived enough with his highness to understand all the threats hidden under a joyful manifestation of the Duc d'Anjou. He might have perceived, also, from the restlessness of some of the faces, that a hostile conversation had been carried on by the duke in his absence, and that it was interrupted by his return. But Henry was not distrustful enough to guess what had been going on; and no one was friend enough to tell him in the presence of the duke.

Besides, Aurilly kept good watch, and the duke, who, no doubt, had almost perfected his plan, kept Henry near him until all the officers present at the conversation had retired.

The duke had made some changes in the distribution of the posts. Thus, when he was alone, Henry had thought it right to hold the centre post, since he was in command, and to establish his headquarters in the house with Diana. He sent the ensign to the most important post after that, which was on the river bank.

The duke, having become chief in place of Henry, took the latter's place, and sent Henry to where the ensign was to have been sent. The prince saw that this was the most important point, and entrusted it to him; it was a perfectly natural thing to do, so natural that every one, Henry first of all, agreed with the idea. But he thought he ought to say a word to the ensign of the gendarmes, and went to him. It was perfectly natural, also, that he should put in his protection the two persons over whom he was watching, and whom he was forced to leave, temporarily, at least. But at the first words which Henry attempted to exchange with the ensign, the duke intervened.

"Secrets?" said he with his smile.

The gendarme had realized but too late the indiscretion he had committed. He repented of it and wished to come to the aid of the count.

"No, monseigneur," he replied; "the count was merely asking me how many pounds of dry powder remained in a condition to be used."

This answer had two objects, if not two results: the first to

turn away the suspicions of the duke, if he had any; the second to show the count that he had an ally on whom he could rely.

"Ah! that is another thing!" replied the duke, forced to believe the words under penalty of compromising his dignity of prince by the rôle of spy.

Then while the duke turned towards the door:

"His highness knows that you are escorting some one," whispered the ensign to Henry.

Du Bouchage gave a start, but he was too late. The act itself had not escaped the duke, and as if to assure himself that the orders had everywhere been carried out, he proposed to the count to conduct him to his post, a suggestion which the latter was forced to accept. Henry had intended to warn Rémy to be on his guard; and to prepare some answer in advance, but there was no way of accomplishing it; all he could do was to take leave of the ensign with these words:

"Watch the powder carefully, will you not? Watch it as I myself would do."

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte," replied the young man.

On the way the duke asked Bouchage:

"Where is this powder you entrusted to our young officer, count?"

"In the house where I established my headquarters, your highness."

"Rest easy, Du Bouchage," replied the duke. "I realize too well the importance of such a trust, in our present situation, not to give it my whole attention. It is not our young ensign who will watch it, but I myself."

The conversation stopped there. Without further words they reached the junction of the two rivers; the duke strongly impressed upon Du Bouchage the importance of his not leaving his post, and returned. He found Aurilly had not left the supper-room, but was lying on a bench, sleeping in an officer's cloak.

The duke tapped him on the shoulder and awoke him. Aurilly rubbed his eyes and looked at the prince.

"You heard?" demanded the latter.

"Yes, monseigneur," replied Aurilly.

"But do you know to what I refer?"

"By Heaven! to the unknown lady, the relative of the Count du Bouchage."

"Good; I see that the faro of Brussels and the beer of Louvan have not yet clouded your brain."

"Why, monseigneur, you have but to speak or merely make a sign, and your highness will see that I am more ingenious than ever."

"Well, then, call all your imagination to your aid and guess."

"Well, monseigneur, I guess that your highness is curious."

"Ah! By Heaven! that is a matter of temperament; it it merely a question of telling me what rouses my curiosity as present."

"You desire to know who is the brave creature who follows these two De Joyeuses through fire and water."

"*Per mille penricula Martis!* as my sister Margot would say, if she were here; you have touched the point, Aurilly. By the way, have you written to her, Aurilly?"

"To whom, monseigneur?"

"To my sister Margot."

"Have I written to her majesty?"

"Yes."

"About what?"

"Why about our having been defeated, by Heaven! ruined, and that she must look out for herself."

"In what respect, monseigneur?"

"Spain being rid of me in the north, will fall on her in the south."

"Ah! that is so."

"You have not written?"

"Why! monseigneur" —

"You were sleeping."

"Yes, I admit it; but still, even had the idea of writing come to me, with what could I have written, monseigneur? I have neither pen, ink, nor paper here."

"Well, look for some. *Quære et invenies*, the Gospel says."

"How the devil can your highness expect me to find all that in the hut of a peasant who, I will wager a thousand against one, does not know how to write?"

"Nevertheless look for some, imbecile, and if you do not find that, well" —

"Well?"

"Well, you will find something else."

"Oh! Fool that I am!" cried Aurilly, striking his fore-

head; "faith, yes, your highness is right, and my head is thick; that is because I am so sleepy, you see, monseigneur."

"Well, well, I will try and believe you; drive away this longing for a while, and since you have not written, I will write myself. Look around, Aurilly, look around, and do not return until you have found something. As for me, I will stay here."

"I will go, monseigneur."

"And if in your searching — wait, if in your searching you find that the house is picturesque in style — You know how I love Flemish interiors, Aurilly!"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Well, you will call me."

"At once, monseigneur, you may rest assured."

Aurilly arose, and started towards the next room. Aurilly was as light as a bird, and scarcely was there the slighest creaking as he put his foot on the stairs; not a sound betrayed his attempt. At the end of five minutes he returned to his master, who had settled himself, as he said, in the great room.

"Well?" demanded the latter.

"Well, monseigneur, if I may trust to appearances, the house must be devilishly picturesque."

"Why so?"

"The deuce! monseigneur, because we cannot enter it as we please."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that a dragon guards it."

"What is this silly joke, my good fellow?"

"Well, monseigneur, unfortunately it is not a silly joke, but a sad fact. The treasure is on the first floor, in a room behind a door, under which a light is shining."

"Well, after?"

"Monseigneur means before."

"Aurilly!"

"Well, before this door, monseigneur, a man is lying on the threshold, in a great gray cloak."

"Oh! oh! Monsieur du Bouchage takes the liberty of stationing a gendarme at the door of his mistress!"

"He is not a gendarme, monseigneur, but some servant belonging to the lady or the count himself."

"What kind of a servant?"

"Monseigneur, it was impossible to see his face, but what I did see, and clearly, was a large Flemish knife in his belt, on which rested a strong hand."

"This is exciting," said the duke; "waken this fellow for me, Aurilly."

"Oh! the idea! no, monseigneur!"

"What is that you say?"

"I say that without counting what might happen to me in regard to the Flemish knife, I do not want to amuse myself by making mortal enemies of the Joyeuses, who hold a rather good position at court. If we were king of the Netherlands — well let that pass; but we have only to be gracious, monseigneur, especially with those who have saved us; and the Joyeuses have done this. Take care, monseigneur, if you do not acknowledge this, they will."

"You are right, Aurilly," said the duke, stamping his foot, "always right, and yet" —

"Yes, I understand; and yet your highness has not seen the face of a single woman for fifteen mortal days. I do not speak of the kind of animal which peoples the polders; that does not deserve the name of man or woman; it is male and female, that is all."

"I wish to see the mistress of Du Bouchage, Aurilly. I wish to see her; do you understand?"

"Yes, monseigneur, I understand."

"Well! answer, then."

"Well, monseigneur, I will answer that you may perhaps see her, but not through the door, at least."

"Very well," said the prince, "if I cannot see her through the door, I will see her through the window."

"Ah! that is an idea, monseigneur; and to prove that I consider it excellent, I will find a ladder for you."

Aurilly slipped into the court-yard, and ran against the post of a shed, in which the gendarmes had sheltered their horses. After some investigation, he found what almost always can be found in a shed; that is, a ladder. He manœuvred it through the midst of men and animals skilfully enough to avoid waking the former or receiving kicks from the latter, and applied it to the outside wall, from the street.

One must be prince and royally scornful of vulgar scruples, as despots by divine right usually are, to dare, in the presence of the sentinel walking back and forth before the door which

confined the prisoners, to attempt an act as audaciously insulting to Du Bouchage as that which the prince was about to undertake. Aurilly understood this, and called the attention of the prince to the sentinel, who, not knowing who the two men were, was about to cry out: "Who goes there?"

Francis shrugged his shoulders, and went straight to the soldier.

Aurilly followed.

"My friend," said the prince, "this place is the most elevated point of the town, is it not?"

"Yes, monseigneur," said the sentinel, who, recognizing Francis, gave him the salute of honor; "and were it not for those lime-trees, which hide the view, by the light of the moon we could see a part of the country."

"I thought as much," said the prince; "so I had this ladder brought that I might look around. Mount it, Aurilly, or no, let me mount it. A prince should see everything for himself."

"Where shall I place the ladder, monseigneur?" asked the hypocritical servant.

"Oh! anywhere; against that wall, for instance."

The ladder in position, the duke mounted it.

Whether he suspected the scheme, or because he was naturally discreet, the sentinel looked away. The prince reached the top of the ladder. Aurilly stood at the foot.

The chamber which Henry had set apart for Diana was covered with matting, and furnished with a great oak bed, with serge curtains, a table, and a few chairs.

The young woman, whose heart seemed relieved of an enormous weight since the false rumor she had heard in the camp of the gendarmes of Aunis concerning the death of the prince, had asked Rémy for a little food. The latter had brought it up quickly and with indescribable delight. Then, for the first time since she had heard of the death of her father, Diana had tasted more substantial food than bread; for the first time she had drank a few drops of Rhine wine which the gendarmes had found in the cellar and had brought to Du Bouchage.

After this meal, light as it was, Diana's blood, heated by so many violent emotions and unexpected fatigues, rushed more impetuously to her head, the road to which it seemed to have forgotten; Rémy saw her eyes grow heavy and her head drop over her shoulder. He discreetly withdrew, and as we have seen, lay down in front of the door; not because he felt the

slightest mistrust, but because he had done so ever since they had left Paris.

It was after this arrangement, which assured tranquillity for the night, that Aurilly had gone upstairs and had found Rémy lying across the hall.

Diana, on her side, was sleeping with her elbow on the table, her head in her hand. Her supple and delicate body was turned to one side in a long low chair; the small iron lamp on the table, near the half empty plate, lighted the room which at first glance seemed so calm, yet in which there had just been extinguished a tempest which was soon to break forth anew.

The wine, scarcely touched by Diana, glowed in the crystal as pure as a liquid diamond. The tall glass, in the shape of a chalice, stood between the lamp and Diana, and softened the light still more, and the complexion of the sleeper's face.

With closed eyes, eyelids veiled in azure, lips half-parted, hair thrown back above the hood of the man's coarse clothes she wore, Diana must have seemed like a sublime vision to the eyes about to violate the secret of her retreat.

On perceiving her the duke could not restrain an exclamation of admiration; he leaned on the ledge of the window, and devoured the smallest details of her ideal beauty. But suddenly in the midst of his contemplation he frowned, and descended two rounds of the ladder in nervous haste.

In that position he was not exposed to the bright light of the window, which he had seemed to avoid; he leaned against the wall, crossed his arms on his breast, and meditated.

Aurilly, who had not lost sight of him, could see him, his eyes staring into space like those of a man who calls to mind his earliest and most fleeting memories.

After standing ten minutes dreamy and motionless, the duke went up again to the window, again stared through its panes, but apparently could not succeed in finding out what he wanted to know, for the same shadow rested on his brow and the same uncertainty in his glance. He was at this point when Aurilly hastily approached the foot of the ladder.

"Quick, quick, monseigneur, come down," said he, "I hear footsteps at the end of the next street."

But instead of following this advice the duke descended slowly, without coming out of his meditation.

"It was time!" said Aurilly.

"In which direction is the noise?" asked the duke.

"From over there," said Aurilly, pointing toward a dark lane.

The prince listened.

"I hear nothing," said he.

"The person must have stopped; it is some spy watching us."

"Take down the ladder," said the prince.

Aurilly obeyed. Meanwhile the prince sat down on one of the stone benches which were on either side of the door.

The noise was not repeated and no one appeared at the end of the lane.

Aurilly came back.

"Well, monseigneur," said he, "is she beautiful?"

"Very," replied the prince, gloomily.

"What makes you so sad, then, monseigneur? Did she see you?"

"She is asleep."

"Then what are you thinking about?"

The prince did not reply.

"Dark? Light?" asked Aurilly.

"It is strange, Aurilly," murmured the prince, "but I have seen this woman somewhere."

"You recognized her, then?"

"No, for I cannot connect any name with her face; but the sight of her made my heart beat violently."

Aurilly, thoroughly astonished, looked at the prince, then with a smile, the irony of which he did not take the trouble to hide:

"You see!" said he.

"Well, monsieur, do not laugh, I beg you," replied Francis, coldly, "do you not see that I am suffering?"

"Oh! monseigneur, is it possible?" exclaimed Aurilly.

"Yes, truly, it is just as I say, I do not know what I feel; but," he added gloomily, "I think I was wrong to look at her."

"And yet because of the effect the sight of this woman has had on you, we must find out who she is, monseigneur."

"Certainly we must," said Francis.

"Seach your memory, monseigneur. Did you see her at court?"

"No, I think not."

"In France, Navarre. Flanders?"

"No."

"Perhaps she is a Spaniard."

"I think not."

"An English woman? Some lady belonging to Queen Elizabeth?"

"No, no; she must have been connected more closely with my life. I think I have known her under some terrible circumstances."

"In that case, you will easily recognize her, for, thank God! the life of monseigneur has not known very many of those circumstances of which your highness just spoke."

"You think so?" said Francis, with a funereal smile.

Aurilly bowed.

"Now," said the duke, "I am sufficiently master of myself to analyze my sensations; this woman is beautiful, but beautiful as a dead woman is beautiful; beautiful as a shade; beautiful as the figures one sees in dreams; so it seems to me that it is in a dream I have seen her; and," continued the duke, "I have had two or three frightful dreams in my life, which have left me heartsick. Well! yes, I am sure of it now; it is in one of those dreams that I have seen this woman."

"Monseigneur! monseigneur!" cried Aurilly, "will your highness permit me to say that seldom have I heard you so sadly express your sensitiveness in the matter of sleep; your highness's heart is fortunately tempered so as to struggle with the sharpest steel, and the living hurt it no more than the dead, I hope; but, monseigneur, if I did not feel that we were being watched from the street, I would mount the ladder myself, and make sure, I promise you, of the dream, the shadow, and the shudder of your highness."

"Faith, you are right, Aurilly; get the ladder, put it up, and mount it; what does it matter if we are watched? Do you not belong to me? Look, Aurilly, look."

Aurilly had already started to obey his master when suddenly a hasty step fell on the road, and Henry cried out to the duke:

"Alarm! monseigneur, alarm!"

With a bound Aurilly rejoined the duke.

"You!" said the prince, "you here, count! and why have you left your post?"

"Monseigneur," replied Henry, firmly, "if your highness thinks you should punish me, do so. In the meantime, my duty was to come here, and I have come."

The duke glanced at the window with a meaning smile.

"Your duty, count? Explain yourself," said he.

"Monseigneur, some horsemen have appeared in the direction of the Scheldt. I do not know whether they are friends or foes."

"Many of them?" asked the duke, with anxiety.

"Very many, monseigneur."

"Well, count, no false bravery. You did well to return; have your gendarmes wakened. Let us go along the bank of the river which is less wide, and decamp. This will be our wisest move."

"No doubt, monseigneur, no doubt; but it will be necessary, I think, to inform my brother."

"Two men will suffice for that."

"If two men are enough, monseigneur," said Henry, "I will go with a gendarme."

"No, by Heaven!" said Francis, quickly; "no, Du Bouchage, you must come with us, plague it. At such times we do not separate ourselves from a defender like you."

"Will your highness lead the entire escort?"

"Yes."

"That is well, monseigneur," replied Henry, bowing; "how long before your highness will start?"

"At once, count."

"Ho, there! some one!" cried Henry.

The young ensign came out of the narrow street as if he were only waiting for this command from his chief in order to appear.

Henry gave him his orders, and almost immediately the gendarmes were seen filling the square from every part of the town, and preparing for the departure.

In their midst the duke made a speech to the officers.

"Gentlemen," said he, "the Prince of Orange is pursuing me, it seems, but it is not right for a son of France to be made prisoner without the pretext of a battle like Poitiers, or Pavia. Let us yield, therefore, to the number and retire to Brussels. I am sure of my life and my liberty so long as I remain with you."

Then turning to Aurilly:

"You will stay here," said he; "the woman cannot follow us. Besides, I am sufficiently well acquainted with these Joyeuses to know that this one would not dare to take his mistress with him in my presence. Moreover, we are not going to a ball, and we are undertaking a journey which would wear the lady."

"Where is monseigneur going?"

"To France. I think that my affairs are completely upset here."

"But to what part of France? Does monseigneur think it prudent for him to return to court?"

"No; therefore, to all appearances, I shall stop on the way, at one of my châteaux, at Château Thierry, for instance."

"Your highness is determined?"

"Yes; the Château Thierry suits me in every respect. It is a convenient distance, about twenty-four leagues from Paris. I can watch the De Guises, who are at Soissons half the year."

"So it is to the Château Thierry that you are to take this beautiful stranger. But, monseigneur, perhaps she will not let herself be taken."

"Are you a fool? Since Du Bouchage is accompanying me to Château Thierry, and since she is following Du Bouchage, matters will arrange themselves."

"But she may wish to go somewhere else if she notices that I desire to take her to you."

"It is not to me you will be taking her, but, I tell you again, to the count. Come now! on my honor, one would suppose it was the first time that you had helped me under similar circumstances. Have you money?"

"I have two rolls of gold which your highness gave me on leaving the camp of the polders."

"Go ahead, then! and by every possible means, you understand, bring my unknown beauty to the Château Thierry. Perhaps on looking more closely at her I may recognize her."

"And the valet also?"

"Yes, if he is not in your way."

"But in case he is?"

"Treat him as you would treat a stone on the way; throw him into a ditch."

"Very well, monseigneur."

While these two deadly conspirators were arranging their

plans in the darkness, Henry went up to the first floor and wakened Rémy.

The latter, warned, knocked in a particular way on the door, which was opened almost immediately by the young woman.

Behind Rémy she perceived Du Bouchage.

"Good evening, monsieur," said she, with a smile, to which her face had not long been accustomed.

"Oh! pardon me, madame," the count hastened to say, "I have not come to trouble you, but to bid you good-by."

"Good-by! you are going away, count?"

"Yes, madame, to France."

"You are going to leave us?"

"I am forced to, madame; my first duty is to obey the prince."

"The prince! Is there a prince here?" asked Rémy.

"What prince?" inquired Diana, growing pale.

"Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou, who was supposed to be dead, but who was miraculously saved, has joined us."

Diana uttered a terrible cry, and Rémy grew so pale that he seemed to have been suddenly struck by death.

"Tell me again," stammered Diana, "that Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou is living, that Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou is here."

"If he were not, madame, and if he had not commanded me to follow him, I should have accompanied you as far as the convent, which, you told me, you think of entering."

"Yes, yes," said Rémy, "the convent, madame, the convent."

And he laid his finger on his lips. A nod of the head from Diana told him that she had understood the sign.

"I would have accompanied you the more gladly, madame," continued Henry, "because you may be annoyed by the followers of the prince."

"How so?"

"Everything leads me to suppose that he knows a woman is in this house, and no doubt he considers this woman a friend of mine."

"What makes you think so?"

"Our young ensign saw him raise a ladder against the wall, and look into your window."

"Oh!" cried Diana, "my God! my God!"

"Reassure yourself, madame, the ensign overheard him say to his companion that he did not know you."

"No matter! no matter!" said the young woman, looking at Rémy.

"Just as you wish, madame," said Rémy, arming his features with supreme determination.

"Do not be alarmed, madame," said Henry, "the duke is leaving at once. In a quarter of an hour you will be alone and free. Permit me, therefore, to salute you humbly, and to say to you again that until my last breath, my heart will beat for you and with you. Adieu, madame, adieu!"

The count bowed with as much reverence as if he were before an altar, and then stepped back.

"No! no!" cried Diana, with the wildness of fever; "no, God does not wish this; no! God killed this man, and he could not have brought him back to life; no, no, monsieur, you are mistaken, he is dead!"

At that instant and as if in answer to the agonizing appeal to celestial pity, the voice of the prince rang out in the street.

"Count," said he, "count, you are keeping us waiting."

"You hear him, madame?" said Henry. "For the last time, adieu!"

And pressing Rémy's hand he hastened down the stairs.

Diana approached the window, as nervous as a bird fascinated by the serpent of the Antilles.

She saw the duke on horseback. His face was lighted by the glare of the torches, carried by two gendarmes.

"Oh! he lives, the demon, he lives!" murmured Diana in Rémy's ear, in such a terrible tone that the worthy servant himself was frightened.

"He lives, let us live also. He leaves for France; so be it, Rémy, it is to France that we will go."

CHAPTER LXXVII.

SEDUCTION.

The preparations for the departure of the gendarmes had thrown the town into confusion. When they had gone, the noise of their arms and voices was succeeded by the most profound silence. Rémy let the sounds die away little by little, until they were entirely lost. Then when he thought the

house was completely deserted he descended to the lower room to prepare for his departure and that of Diana.

On pushing open the door of the room he was greatly surprised to see a man seated near the fire, his face turned towards him. This man was evidently waiting for Rémy's departure, although on seeing him he assumed an air of the utmost indifference.

Rémy approached, according to his habit, with a slow, halting step, uncovering his bald forehead like that of an old man bowed down with years.

The one he approached had the light behind him, so that Rémy could not distinguish his features.

"Pardon, monsieur," said he, "I thought I was alone or almost alone here."

"I, too," replied the other; "but I see with pleasure that I am to have company."

"Oh! very sad company, monsieur," Rémy hastened to say, "for with the exception of an invalid young man whom I am taking to France" —

"Ah!" said Aurilly at once, affecting all the interest of a sympathizing bourgeois, "I know what you mean."

"Indeed?" said Rémy.

"Yes; you refer to the young woman."

"What young woman?" cried Rémy, on the defensive.

"There! there! do not get angry, my good friend," replied Aurilly. "I am the steward of the house of Joyeuse; I have joined my young master at his brother's order, and when he left, the count recommended to me a young woman and an old servant, who are about to return to France, after having followed him to Flanders" —

As the man uttered these words he approached Rémy with a smiling and affectionate look. In moving, he had placed himself in the line of a ray from the lamp, so that the light fell on him. Rémy could then see him.

But instead of advancing towards the speaker Rémy stepped back, and a look like one of horror appeared for an instant on his mutilated features.

"You do not reply; one would imagine you were afraid of me?" said Aurilly, with his most smiling look.

"Monsieur," replied Rémy, affecting a broken voice, "pardon a poor old man whom troubles and wounds have made timid and distrustful."

"All the more reason, my friend," replied Aurilly, "for you to accept the aid and support of an honest companion; besides, as I just told you, I come on the part of a master who ought to inspire you with confidence."

"Surely, monsieur."

Rémy withdrew a step.

"You are leaving me?"

"I will consult my mistress; I can take nothing on myself, you understand."

"Oh! that is natural; but allow me to present myself. I can explain my mission in all its details."

"No, no, thanks; madame is perhaps still asleep, and her sleep is sacred to me."

"As you please. Besides, I have nothing further to say except what my master told me to communicate to you."

"To me?"

"To you and the young woman."

"Your master is Monsieur le Comte du Bouchage, is he not?"

"Yes."

"Thanks, monsieur."

When he had closed the door, every appearance of the old man, except the bald front and wrinkled face, at once disappeared, and Rémy mounted the stairs with such haste and with so extraordinary a vigor that the old man who an instant before had appeared to be sixty years of age would not have been thought even twenty-five.

"Madame! madame!" cried Rémy in a startled voice as soon as he saw Diana.

"Well, what is the matter now, Rémy? Has not the duke gone?"

"Yes, madame; but there is a demon here a thousand times worse, a thousand times more to be feared than he; a demon on whom daily, for six years, I have called down the vengeance of Heaven, as you have done on his master, and as you have done on him also, while waiting for mine."

"Aurilly, perhaps?" said Diana.

"Aurilly himself; the infamous wretch is below, forgotten by his infernal accomplice, like a serpent out of its nest."

"Forgotten, you say, Rémy? Oh! you are mistaken; you who know the duke are well aware that he does not leave to chance the task of doing the evil when he can do the evil him-

self. No! no! Rémy, Aurilly has not been forgotten here, he has been left here, and left for some object, believe me."

"Oh, as to him, madame, I will believe anything you wish."

"Does he know me?"

"I think not."

"Did he recognize you?"

"Oh! madame," replied Rémy, with a sad smile, "no one ever recognizes me."

"He guesses who I am, perhaps?"

"No, for he has asked to see you?"

"Rémy, I tell you if he does not recognize me, he suspects me."

"In that case, nothing is more simple," said Rémy, gloomily, "and I thank God for having so clearly pointed out our way to us; the town is deserted, the wretch is alone, as I am alone. I saw a dagger in his belt — I have a knife in mine."

"One moment, Rémy, one moment," said Diana, "I will not dispute with you the life of this wretch, but before killing him we must know what he wants of us, and if in our present situation there is not a way of utilizing the evil he wishes to do to us — How did he pass himself off to you, Rémy?"

"As the steward of Monsieur du Bouchage, madame."

"You see he lies; and he must have some interest in lying. Let us find out what he wants by hiding our intention from him."

"I will act according to your orders, madame."

"What does he want?"

"To accompany you."

"In what capacity?"

"As the steward of the count."

"Tell him that I accept."

"Oh, madame!"

"Add that I am about to go to England, where I have relatives, and yet I hesitate; lie just as he does; to conquer, Rémy, one must at least fight with equal arms."

"He will see you."

"But I have my mask! Besides, I suspect that he knows me, Rémy."

"Then if he knows you he is laying a snare for you."

"The way of avoiding it is to pretend to fall into it."

"But" —

"Come, what do you fear? Do you know anything worse than death?"

"No."

"Well! have you not resolved to die in order to carry out our vow?"

"Yes; but not to die without revenge."

"Rémy, Rémy!" said Diana, with a brilliant glance of savage exultation, "we will avenge ourselves, rest assured, you on the servant, I on the master."

"Very well, so be it, madame, the thing is settled."

"Go down, my friend, go."

Rémy descended, but with hesitation. At sight of Aurilly, in spite of himself the brave young man had felt that nervous shiver full of gloomy terror one experiences at sight of reptiles; he had wished to kill because he was afraid. And yet as he went downstairs again the resolution returned to his soul so firmly tempered that, on opening the door, he determined, notwithstanding the advice of Diana, to question Aurilly, to confound him, and if he discovered he had the evil intentions he suspected, to stab him on the spot.

It was in this way that Rémy understood diplomacy.

Aurilly was waiting for him with impatience; he had opened the window in order to watch every means of escape at a glance.

Rémy entered, armed with an unshaken resolution; so his words were gentle and calm.

"Monsieur," said he, "my mistress cannot accept what you propose."

"Why not?"

"Because you are not the steward of Monsieur du Bouchage."

Aurilly turned pale.

"Who told you this?" he asked.

"The explanation is very simple: on leaving, Monsieur du Bouchage entrusted to my care the lady who is with me, and Monsieur du Bouchage did not say a word about you."

"He did not see me until after he had left you."

"Lies, monsieur, lies!"

Aurilly rose; the aspect of Rémy gave him every appearance of an old man.

"You assume a strange tone, my good man," said he, frowning. "Take care: you are old, I am young; you are weak, I am strong."

Rémy smiled, but said nothing.

"If I intended evil to you or your mistress," continued Aurilly, "I need only raise my hand."

"Oh! Oh!" said Rémy, "possibly I am mistaken, and that it is good you intend her?"

"Without doubt."

"Tell me what you desire, then."

"My friend," said Aurilly, "I desire to make your fortune at once, if you will serve me."

"And if I will not serve you?"

"In that case, since you speak frankly to me, I will answer you with equal frankness; in that case I will kill you."

"Kill me! Ah!" said Rémy, with a gloomy smile.

"Yes, I have full power to do so."

Rémy breathed heavily.

"But for me to serve you," said he, "I must at least know your plans."

"Here they are; you have guessed rightly, my good fellow; I do not belong to Count du Bouchage."

"Ah! to whom, then?"

"To a more powerful lord."

"Be careful; you are going to lie again."

"How so?"

"I do not know many houses above that of De Joyeuse."

"Not even the house of France?"

"Oh! Oh!" exclaimed Rémy.

"And this is how it pays," added Aurilly, slipping one of the duke's rolls of gold into Rémy's hand.

The latter shuddered at contact with this hand, and withdrew a step.

"You belong to the King?" he asked, with an innocence which would have done credit even to a man more designing than himself.

"No, but to his brother, the Duc d'Anjou."

"Ah! very good; I am the very humble servant of Monsieur le Duc."

"Good."

"But next?"

"Next?"

"Yes, what does monseigneur desire?"

"Monseigneur, my very dear fellow," said Aurilly, approach-

ing Rémy, and trying a second time to slip the gold into his hand, "Monseigneur is in love with your mistress."

"He knows her, then?"

"He has seen her."

"Seen her!" cried Rémy, whose clinched hand went towards the handle of his knife. "When did he see her?"

"This evening."

"Impossible! My mistress has not left her room."

"Well! that is just it; the prince acted like a regular schoolboy, which proves that he is really in love."

"How did he act? Come, tell me."

"He took a ladder, and climbed to the balcony."

"Ah!" cried Rémy, repressing the tumultuous beating of his heart. "Ah! that is what he did?"

"It seems that she is very beautiful," added Aurilly.

"You have not seen her, have you?"

"No, but after all monseigneur told me, I am dying to see her; were it only to judge of the exaggeration which love causes in a sensible mind. So, then, it is settled. You are with us?"

And for the third time Aurilly strove to induce Rémy to accept the gold.

"Certainly I am with you," said Rémy, pushing aside the hand of Aurilly; "but still I must know what my rôle is to be in the events you are planning."

"First tell me if the lady upstairs is the mistress of Du Bouchage or of his brother."

The blood mounted to Rémy's face.

"Neither of the one nor of the other," said he, with constraint; "the lady upstairs has no lover."

"No lover! Why, in that case, she is a morsel for a king; a woman without a lover! By Heaven! monseigneur, we have found the philosopher's stone."

"So," went on Rémy, "Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou is in love with my mistress?"

"Yes."

"And what does he want?"

"He wants to have her at Château Thierry, whither he is repairing by forced marches."

"Upon my soul, it is a very sudden passion."

"Passions come to monseigneur in that way."

"I see only one obstacle to this," said Rémy.

"What is that?"

"The fact that my mistress is about to sail for England."

"The devil! Now this is just where you can be useful to me. Persuade her."

"To do what?"

"To take the opposite road."

"You do not know my mistress, monsieur; she is a woman who carries out her ideas. Besides, it would not be anything for her to go to France instead of London. Once at the Château Thierry do you think she would yield to the desires of the prince?"

"Why not?"

"She does not love the Duc d'Anjou."

"Bah! one always loves a prince of the blood."

"But if he suspected that my mistress was in love with the Count du Bouchage or the Duc de Joyeuse, how could the Duc d'Anjou have had the idea of taking her away from her lover?"

"My good man," said Aurilly, "you have trivial ideas, and I see we are going to have trouble in understanding each other; therefore I will not argue. I preferred gentleness to violence, but if you force me to change my manner, well, so be it, I will change it."

"What will you do?"

"I have told you I have the full consent of the prince. I will kill you in some corner, and will carry off the lady."

"You believe you could do this with impunity?"

"I believe everything my master told me to believe. Come, will you persuade your mistress to come to France?"

"I will try; but I cannot promise anything."

"And when shall I have her answer?"

"As soon as I have gone upstairs and consulted her."

"Very well, go; I will wait for you."

"I will obey, monsieur."

"A final word, my good fellow; you know that I hold your fortune and your life in my hand?"

"I know it."

"That is enough, go; in the meantime I will look after the horses."

"Do not be in too great a hurry."

"Bah! I am sure of the answer. Do princes meet with cruelty from women?"

"It seems to me that sometimes happens."

"Yes," said Aurilly, "but very seldom; go."

While Rémy was upstairs, Aurilly, as if he were certain of the success of his hopes, went to the stable.

"Well?" asked Diana, on perceiving Rémy.

"Well, madame, the duke has seen you."

"And" —

"And he loves you."

"The duke has seen me! The duke loves me!" cried Diana; "why you must be out of your head, Rémy!"

"No, I am telling you what he told me."

"Who told you this?"

"That man Aurilly! that wretch!"

"But if he saw me, he must have recognized me."

"Had the duke recognized you, do you think that Aurilly would dare to appear before you and speak to you of love in the name of the prince? No, the duke did not recognize you."

"You are right, a thousand times right, Rémy. During the past six years so much has passed through his infernal brain that he has forgotten me. Let us follow this man, Rémy."

"Yes, but he will recognize you."

"Why do you assume that he has a longer memory than his master?"

"Oh! because it is to his interest to remember, while it is to the interest of the prince to forget. That the duke, being the evil debauchee, the blind, surfeited villain, and assassin of his loves, that he is, might forget is easy to conceive; if he did not forget, how could he live? But Aurilly will not have forgotten; if he sees your face, he will think he sees an avenging shade, and will denounce you."

"Rémy, I thought I told you I had a mask. I thought you told me you had a knife?"

"That is true, madame," said Rémy, "and I am beginning to believe that God is in league with us to punish these evil men."

Then calling Aurilly from the top of the stair:

"Monsieur," said he, "monsieur!"

"Well?" demanded Aurilly.

"Well! my mistress thanks Monsieur le Comte du Bouchage for having thus provided for her safety, and she accepts with gratitude your kind offer."

"That is well, that is well," said Aurilly; "tell her that the horses are ready."

"Come, madame, come," said Rémy, offering Diana his arm.

Aurilly, lantern in hand, was waiting at the foot of the stairs, eager to see the face of the unknown lady.

"The devil!" he muttered, "she wears a mask. Oh! but between here and the Château Thierry the silk cords shall be worn out — or cut!"

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE JOURNEY.

They set out.

Towards Rémy, Aurilly assumed a manner of the most perfect equality, and towards Diana the deepest respect.

But it was easy for Rémy to see that this respect was interested. In short, to hold a woman's stirrup when she mounts and dismounts, to watch each of her movements with solicitude, and never to let the opportunity escape to pick up her glove or to fasten her cloak, is the duty of a lover, a servant, or an inquisitive person.

By touching her glove, Aurilly saw her hand; by fastening her cloak, he looked under her mask; by holding her stirrup, he ran a chance of seeing her face, which the prince, in his confused memories, had not recognized, but which he, Aurilly, with his excellent memory, counted on remembering. But the musician was dealing with a strong party. Rémy claimed his place by the side of his companion, and showed that he was jealous of the attentions of Aurilly. Diana herself, without appearing to suspect the reasons for this kindness, took the part of the one whom Aurilly regarded as an old servant, and whom he wished to relieve of a part of his duty, and she begged Aurilly to let Rémy do what he had to do by himself.

During the long ride, Aurilly was reduced to hope for darkness and rain, and during their halts to wish for the meals.

However, he was disappointed in his expectation; neither rain nor sun made any difference, and the mask remained over the lady's face; as to the meals, they were taken by the young woman in a separate room.

Aurilly understood that although he did not recognize the travellers they recognized him; he strove to look in the keyholes, but the lady always turned her back to the door; he

endeavored to see through the windows, but he found thick curtains before them, or in default of curtains the travellers' cloaks.

Neither questions nor attempts at bribery succeeded with Rémy; the servant said that such was the wish of his mistress and consequently his own.

"But are these precautions taken for me alone?" asked Aurilly.

"No, for every one."

"Yet the Duc d'Anjou saw her; she was not hiding then."

"Chance, pure chance," replied Rémy, "and it is just because, in spite of herself, my mistress was seen by the Duc d'Anjou that she is taking precautions to be seen by no one else."

The days passed. The travellers were drawing near to the journey's end, and, thanks to the care of Rémy and his mistress, the curiosity of Aurilly had been held at bay.

Already Picardy appeared before their eyes.

Aurilly, who for three or four days had tried everything, kindness, sulkiness, little attentions, and almost violence, was beginning to lose patience and the evil instincts of his nature were little by little gaining the ascendancy. One would have said that he felt that a mortal secret was hidden beneath the veil of that woman.

One day he lagged somewhat behind with Rémy and renewed his attempts at seduction, which, as usual, Rémy repulsed.

"Well," said Aurilly, "some day or other I will see your mistress."

"No doubt," said Rémy, "but it will be when she wishes, and not when you wish."

"But if I should resort to violence?" said Aurilly.

A flash which he could not restrain shot from Rémy's eyes.

"Try!" said he.

Aurilly saw the flash, and realized the energy there was in the one he took for an old man.

He began to laugh.

"What a fool I am!" said he; "what difference does it make to me who she is? She is the one, is she not, whom the Duc d'Anjou saw?"

"Certainly."

"And whom he told me to bring to Château Thierry?"

"Yes."

"Well! that is all that is necessary; I am not the one who is in love with her; it is monseigneur, and provided that you do not try to run away, to escape from me"—

"Do we look as though we would do that?" asked Rémy.

"No."

"It is so far from our intention that were you not here we should continue our way to Château Thierry; if the duke desires to see us, we too desire to see him."

"In that case," said Aurilly, "everything agrees wonderfully well."

Then as if he wanted to find out the real motive of Rémy and his companion in not changing their road:

"Does your mistress want to stop here a few moments?" said he, pointing to an inn by the wayside.

"You know," said Rémy, "that my mistress stops only in cities."

"I have noticed that," said Aurilly, "but I did not think much about it."

"Such is the case."

"Well! I have made no vow, so I will stop for an instant; keep on, and I will overtake you."

Aurilly indicated the road to Rémy, dismounted, and approached the host, who came towards him with a great show of respect, as though he knew him.

Rémy rejoined Diana.

"What was he saying to you?" asked the young woman.

"He was expressing his usual desire."

"To see me?"

"Yes."

Diana smiled behind her mask.

"Be careful," said Rémy, "he is furious."

"He shall not see me. I do not wish it, and that means that he cannot do so."

"But once at the Château Thierry, will he not see you without your mask?"

"What difference does it make, if the discovery comes too late for them? Besides, his master did not recognize me."

"No, but the servant will."

"You see that so far neither my voice nor my step have made any impression on him."

"Never mind, madame," said Rémy, "all these mysteries

which for eight days have existed for Aurilly did not exist for the prince, and did not arouse his curiosity nor awaken his memories; whereas for eight days Aurilly has been seeking, calculating, reckoning. Your face will make an impression on his memory, which is awakened on all these points, and he will recognize you, if he has not already done so."

At that instant they were interrupted by Aurilly, who had taken a cross-road, and having followed them without losing sight of them, suddenly appeared in the hope of catching a few words of their conversation.

The sudden silence which greeted his arrival was a positive proof to him that he was in the way; therefore he followed behind as he had occasionally done.

From that moment Aurilly's plan was determined on. He really mistrusted something, as Rémy had said; but he mistrusted instinctively, for, not for an instant had his mind, floating from conjecture to conjecture, reached the truth.

He could not understand why they hid from him so persistently the face he would surely see sooner or later.

The better to carry out his plan, he seemed from that moment to have completely renounced it, and became the easiest and the merriest companion possible during the remainder of the journey.

Rémy noted this change not without anxiety.

They came to a town where as usual they spent the night.

The following day, under the pretext that the journey was long, they started at daybreak.

At noon they had to stop to rest their horses.

At two o'clock they resumed the journey. They rode until four. A deep forest appeared in the distance; it was that of La Fère. It had the gloomy and mysterious aspect of our northern forests; but this aspect, so imposing to southern natures, which above all else need light and heat, was powerless upon Rémy and Diana, accustomed to the dense woods of Anjou and Sologne.

They merely exchanged a glance as if both understood that it was there that the event was to take place which from the time of their departure had hovered over their heads.

They entered the forest.

It might have been six o'clock in the afternoon. At the end of half an hour's ride, daylight began to wane.

A strong wind tossed the leaves about and carried them to

an immense pond, lost in the shadow of the trees, like a Dead Sea, and which lay along the side of the road stretching out before the travellers.

For two hours the rain, which fell in torrents, had been soaking the clayey soil. Diana, quite sure of her horse and wholly indifferent as to her own safety, let him go as he pleased; Aurilly rode on her right, Rémy on her left.

Aurilly was on the edge of the pond, Rémy in the middle of the road.

No human being appeared under the sombre arch of verdure on the long winding road.

One would have said that the forest was one of those enchanted forests beneath the shadow of which nothing can live, if one had not occasionally heard, issuing from the depths, the hoarse howling of the wolves awakened by the coming of night.

Suddenly Diana felt her saddle, usually adjusted by Rémy, slip and turn; she spoke to Rémy, who jumped from his horse and leaned over to tighten the girths.

Just then Aurilly drew near Diana, who was paying no attention to him, and with the point of his dagger cut the silk cord which held her mask.

Before she guessed what he was doing or had raised her hand to her face, Aurilly lifted the mask and leaned towards her as she bent over towards him.

The eyes of the two met in a terrible glance; no one could have said which was paler and more threatening.

Aurilly felt a cold perspiration cover his forehead, dropped the mask and the dagger, and clasped his hands in agony, crying:

"Heaven and earth! The Lady of Monsoreau!"

"It is a name you shall not repeat!" cried Rémy, seizing him and pulling him from his horse.

Both rolled to the ground. Aurilly stretched out his hand to pick up his dagger.

"No, Aurilly, no," said Rémy, bending over him and placing his knee on his breast, "no, you must stay here."

The final veil which seemed spread over Aurilly's memory seemed to fall away.

"Le Haudouin!" he cried, "I am dead!"

"That is not true, as yet," said Rémy, placing his hand over the mouth of the wretched man, who struggled beneath him, "but it will be very soon!"

And with his right hand he drew his knife from its sheath.

"Now, Aurilly," said he, "you are right, now you are really dead."

The steel disappeared in the throat of the musician, who uttered an inarticulate death-rattle.

Diana, with haggard eyes, but without pity, half turned in her saddle and leaning trembling on the pommel, had not taken her eyes from the terrible scene.

But when she saw the blood spurt along the blade, she fell back and dropped from her horse, as stiff as if she were dead.

Rémy paid no attention to her; at that dreadful moment he searched Aurilly, removed the two rolls of gold from him, attached a stone to the neck of the body, and threw it into the pond. The rain continued to fall in torrents.

"Efface, O my God!" said he, "efface the mark of thy justice, for it has still other guilty ones to strike."

Then he washed his hands in the dark, sleeping water, took Diana, who was still unconscious, in his arms, lifted her on to her horse, and, still supporting her, mounted his own.

Aurilly's horse, frightened by the howling of the wolves, which were approaching as if the scene had called them, disappeared in the woods.

When Diana recovered consciousness, the two travellers, without exchanging a single word, continued their way to Château Thierry.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

HOW KING HENRY III. DID NOT INVITE CRILLON TO BREAKFAST, AND HOW CHICOT INVITED HIMSELF.

The day following the one on which the events we have just related took place in the forest of La Fère, the King of France came out of his bath at about nine o'clock in the morning.

His valet, having rolled him in a blanket of fine wool and sponged him with two pieces of the thick Persian wadding which resembles the fleece of sheep, had given place to the barbers and dressers, who in turn gave place to the perfumers and courtiers.

The latter having at length departed, the King sent for his steward and said that he would take something besides his

usual broth, as he felt hungry that morning. This good news was instantly circulated through the Louvre, and caused a very real joy there. The flavor of the meats was beginning to issue from the pantries, when Crillon, colonel of the French guards, we may remember, entered his Majesty's chamber to receive orders.

"Faith, my good Crillon," said the King, "watch as much as you please this morning over the safety of my person; but for God's sake do not make me play the King; I am perfectly contented and happy to-day; it seems to me that I do not weigh an ounce, and that I am about to fly away. I am hungry, Crillon, do you understand this, my friend?"

"I understand it much better, sire," replied the colonel of the French guards, "as I am very hungry myself."

"Oh! you, Crillon!" said the King, laughing; "you are always hungry."

"Not always, sire; oh! no, your Majesty exaggerates; only three times a day; and your Majesty?"

"I? Oh! once a year, and also when I have received good news."

"*Harnibieu!* it seems, then, that you have received good news, sire? So much the better, so much the better! for good news comes rarer and rarer, it seems to me."

"Not at all, Crillon; but you know the proverb?"

"Ah! yes, 'no news, good news.' I do not believe in proverbs, sire, and especially in that one. Has nothing come to you from Navarre?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"No; which proves that they are asleep."

"And from Flanders?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? which proves that they are fighting. And from Paris?"

"Nothing."

"Which proves that they are hatching plots."

"Or children, Crillon; speaking of children, Crillon, I think that I am going to have one."

"You, sire!" cried Crillon, in amazement.

"Yes; the queen dreamed last night that she was pregnant."

"Well, sire," said Crillon.

"Well! what?"

"It makes me as happy as possible to know that your Majesty is hungry so early in the morning. Adieu, sire!"

"Go, my good Crillon, go."

"*Harnibieu!* sire," said Crillon, "since your Majesty is so hungry you ought to ask me to breakfast."

"Why, Crillon?"

"Because they say your Majesty lives on the air of the times, which makes you thin, because the air is bad, and because I should be delighted to be able to say: '*Harnibieu!* those are pure calumnies, the King eats like every one else.'"

"No, Crillon, no; on the contrary, let them think as they do; it makes me blush to eat before my subjects like an ordinary mortal. So, Crillon, understand this: a king should always be poetic, and appear only noble. Thus, let us take an example."

"I am listening, sire."

"You remember King Alexander?"

"What King Alexander?"

"Alexander Magnus. Ah! you do not understand Latin, it is true. Well! Alexander loved to bathe before his soldiers because he was beautiful, well formed, and sufficiently plump for them to compare him to Apollo, and even to Antinous."

"Oh! oh!" said Crillon, "you would be devilishly wrong to do as he did and bathe before yours, for you are very thin, my poor sire."

"Go, my good Crillon," said Henry, tapping him on the shoulder. "You are a very excellent brute. You do not flatter me. You are no courtier, my old friend."

"That is because you do not invite me to breakfast," said Crillon, laughing good naturedly, and taking leave of the King, more satisfied than otherwise, for the tap on his shoulder had offset the absent breakfast. Crillon left, and the table was immediately set.

The royal steward had surpassed himself. A certain partridge stew, with a purée of truffles and chestnuts, first attracted the attention of the King, whom some fine oysters had already tempted.

So the usual broth, the faithful comforter of the monarch, was neglected; in vain it raised its great eyes from its gold bowl; its begging eyes, as Theophilus would say, received absolutely nothing from his Majesty. The King began an attack on his partridge stew.

WITH HIS RIGHT HAND HE DREW HIS KNIFE FROM ITS SHEATH.

He had reached the fourth mouthful when a light step fell on the floor behind him, a chair creaked on its rollers, and a well-known voice exclaimed sharply :

"A plate ! "

The King turned.

"Chicot ! " he cried.

"In person."

And Chicot, resuming his habits, which no absence could make him forget, stretched himself in his chair, took a plate and fork, turned to the oysters, sprinkled them with lemon, and chose the largest and the fattest of them, without adding a single word.

"You here ! you back again ! " cried Henry.

"Hush ! " said Chicot with his hand. His mouth was full.

He took advantage of this exclamation of the King to draw the partridge towards him.

"Stop, Chicot, that is my dish ! " exclaimed Henry, putting out his hand to retain the stew.

Chicot divided with his prince in a brotherly way, and returned the half to him.

Then he poured out some wine, passed from the stew to a tunny-fish pâté, from that to stuffed crawfish, swallowed for form's sake, and on top of all the rest, the royal broth. Then with a great sigh :

"I am no longer hungry," said he.

"Good Heavens ! I should hope not, Chicot."

"Ah ! — good morning, my King, how are you ? You seem rather lively this morning."

"Don't I, Chicot ? "

"You have a charming color."

"Eh ? "

"Is it your own ? "

"Indeed ! "

"In that case, I congratulate you."

"The fact is I feel particularly well this morning."

"So much the better, my King, so much the better. Ah ! but is your breakfast over ? Are there not still some little dainties ? "

"Here are some cherries preserved by the ladies of Montmartre."

"Those are too sweet."

"Nuts stuffed with raisins."

"Fie! they have left the stones in them!"

"Nothing satisfies you."

"Because, on my word, everything is degenerating, even the kitchen, and they live worse and worse at your court."

"Do they live better at the court of the King of Navarre?" asked Henry, laughing.

"Oh, well — I would not deny it."

"Then they must have made great changes there."

"Ah! as to that, you do not know how truly you speak, Henriquet."

"Tell me a little about your trip; it will amuse me."

"Very gladly. I came for that. Where do you want me to begin?"

"At the beginning. What kind of a journey did you have?"

"Oh! a regular stroll."

"You met with no obstacle on the way?"

"It was a fairy-like trip."

"No unfortunate encounters?"

"Come now! Would any one be allowed to look askance at an ambassador of his very Christian Majesty? You calumniate your subjects, my son."

"I said so," replied the King, flattered by the calm which was reigning in his kingdom; "because having no official character nor prominent position, you might have run a risk."

"I tell you, Henriquet, that you have the most delightful kingdom in the world; travellers are provided for free of charge, they are lodged for the love of God; they walk only on flowers, and even the ruts in the road are carpeted with velvet fringed with gold; it may seem incredible, but so it is."

"Then you were pleased, Chicot?"

"Charmed."

"Yes. My police force is good."

"Wonderful! It is only justice to say that."

"And the road is safe?"

"As that of Paradise; you meet on it only little angels, singing the praises of the King as they pass."

"Chicot, we are getting back to Virgil."

"To what part of Virgil?"

"To the Bucolics. *O fortunatos nimium!*"

"Very good, but why this exception in favor of the ploughmen, my son?"

"Alas! because it is not the same in the cities."

"The fact is, Henry, that the cities are a centre of corruption."

"You ought to know; you travelled five hundred leagues without hindrance."

"On rollers as I told you."

"Now, I went only to Vincennes, three-quarters of a mile" —

"Well?"

"Well, I came near being assassinated on the way."

"Bah!" exclaimed Chicot.

"I will tell you about it, my friend. I am going to have the affair published in detail; had it not been for my Forty-Five I would have been killed."

"Indeed! And where did it happen?"

"You mean where was it to have happened?"

"Yes."

"At Bel Esbat."

"Near the convent of our friend Gorenflot?"

"Exactly."

"And how did our friend act under the circumstances?"

"Wonderfully, as always, Chicot. I do not know whether he had heard any rumor of it, but instead of snoring, as all my lazy monks generally do at that hour, he was standing on his balcony, while the whole convent were holding the road."

"And he did nothing else?"

"Who?"

"Dom Modeste?"

"He blessed me with a dignity which belongs only to him, Chicot."

"And his monks?"

"They shouted with all their might: 'Long live the King!'"

"And you noticed nothing else?"

"What else?"

"That they carried arms under their gowns?"

"They were armed with all sorts of weapons, Chicot; in that, I recognized the foresight of the worthy prior; that is why I say that that man knew everything, and yet he said nothing, asked for nothing; he did not come the next day, as D'Épernon did, to search in all my pockets, and say: 'Sire, for having saved the King!'"

"Oh! he would be incapable of that; besides, his hands could not get into your pockets."

"Chicot, no joking about Dom Modeste; he is one of the very great men who will make my reign famous; and I declare to you that the first opportunity I have I will give him a bishopric."

"You will do very well, my King."

"Note one thing, Chicot," said the King, assuming his impressive manner, "when they come from the ranks, men of talent are perfect. We noblemen, you see, inherit certain virtues and vices which make us historical specialties. Thus, the Valois are sly and subtle, brave, but idle; the Lorraines are ambitious and greedy, with ideas, intrigue, and movement; the Bourbons are sensual and circumspect, but without ideas, without strength, without will, — take Henry, for instance; when Nature, on the other hand, all at once moulds a man born with nothing, she uses only her finest clay; so your Gorenflot is perfect."

"You think so?"

"Yes, learned, modest, crafty, and brave; one could make anything of him, a minister, a general, or a pope."

"There! there! sire, stop," said Chicot; "if the good man were to hear you, he would burst his skin, for he is very proud, whatever you may say of him, this prior Don Modeste."

"You are jealous, Chicot!"

"I! God forbid! Jealousy! fie! the villanous passion!"

"Oh, I am just, noble blood does not blind me, *stemmata quid faciunt?*"

"Bravo! and you say, my King, that you came near being assassinated?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"By the League, great Heavens!"

"How is the League?"

"Just the same."

"Which means better and better; it is growing fat, Henriquet, it is growing fat."

"Oh! oh! political bodies which grow fat too young do not live; they are like children, Chicot."

"So you are satisfied, my son?"

"Partly."

"You feel yourself in Paradise?"

"Yes, Chicot, and it is a great delight to have you come back in the midst of my happiness; I anticipate an increase of joy by it."

"*Habemus consulem factum!* as Cato said."

"You bring good news, do you not, my son?"

"I think so."

"And you keep me waiting for it, nice fellow that you are."

"Where do you want me to begin, my King?"

"I have already told you — at the beginning; but you always wander from the subject."

"Must I start from the day I left?"

"No, the trip was good, you told me, did you not?"

"You see that I have apparently returned whole."

"Yes; let me hear about your arrival in Navarre."

"I agree to that."

"What was Henry doing when you arrived?"

"Making love."

"To Margot?"

"Oh! no."

"That would have surprised me. He is still faithless to his wife, then? The rascal! faithless to a daughter of France! Fortunately, she pays him back. Well, when you arrived, what was the name of Margot's rival?"

"Fosseuse."

"A Montmorency! Come, that is not bad for this Béarnais bear. There was talk here of a peasant, a gardener's daughter, a bourgeois."

"Oh! all that is old."

"So Margot is deceived?"

"As much as a woman can be."

"And she is furious?"

"Enraged."

"And she avenges herself?"

"She certainly does."

Henry clapped his hands with unparalleled joy.

"What is she going to do?" cried he, laughing; "will she move heaven and earth, hurl Spain at Navarre, Artois and Flanders at Spain? Will she call her little brother Henriquet against her little husband Henriot, hey?"

"It is possible."

"You saw her?"

"Yes."

"And when you left, what was she doing?"

"Oh! as to that, you would never guess."

"She was preparing to take another lover?"

"She was preparing to be *sage-femme*."[1]

"What? What does that sentence mean, or rather that anti-French inversion? It is equivocal, Chicot; beware of equivocation!"

"No, my King, no. The deuce! We are too much of a grammarian to be guilty of equivocation, too delicate to talk nonsense, and too truthful ever to have meant to say *femme sage*.[2] No, no, my King, I said *sage-femme*."

"*Obstetrix?*"

"*Obstetrix*, yes, my King; *Juno Lucina*, if you prefer."

"Monsieur Chicot!"

"Oh! roll your eyes as much as you please, I tell you that when I left Nérac your sister Margot was about to have a confinement case."

"On her own account?" cried Henry, growing pale; "Margot is to have children?"

"No, no, on her husband's account; you well know that the last Valois have not the prolific virtue; they are not like the Bourbons, the deuce!"

"So Margot is about to deliver actively" —

"Everything there is most active."

"Whom is she" —

"Mademoiselle Fosseuse."

"Faith, I do not understand," said the King.

"Nor I, either," said Chicot; "but I did not pledge myself to make you understand. I promised to tell you the facts, that was all."

"But perhaps she consented to this humiliation very unwillingly?"

"Certainly, there was a struggle; but in every struggle there is inferiority on the part of one or the other. Take Hercules with Anteus, or Jacob with the angel. Well, your sister has been weaker than Henry, that is all."

"By Heaven, I am glad, in truth!"

"Wicked brother!"

"They must hate each other, then?"

"I think that at heart they do not adore each other."

"But apparently?"

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[1] Midwife. [2] A wise woman.

"They are the best friends in the world, Henry."

"Yes; but some fine morning a new love will arise which will completely embroil them."

"Well! this new love has come, Henry."

"Bah!"

"Yes, on my honor; but shall I tell you what I fear?"

"Yes."

"I fear that this new love, instead of embroiling them, will bring them nearer together."

"So there is a new love?"

"Ah! my God, yes."

"Of the Béarnais?"

"Of the Béarnais."

"For whom?"

"Wait a minute; you want to know everything, do you not?"

"Yes, let me know, Chicot, let me know; you tell a story very well."

"Thanks, my son; but if you want to know everything I must begin again at the beginning."

"Well, begin again, but do it quickly."

"You wrote a letter to the fierce Béarnais."

"How do you know that?"

"By Heaven! I read it."

"What do you say to it?"

"That although the tenor of it was not delicate, it was at least astute in language."

"It ought to have caused trouble between them."

"Yes, if Henry and Margot were an ordinary bourgeois couple."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the Béarnais is not a beast."

"Oh!"

"And that he guessed."

"Guessed what?"

"That you wished to cause trouble between him and his wife."

"That was evident."

"Yes, but what was less so was the reason you had for wishing to embroil them."

"Ah! the devil! the reason" —

"Yes, this cursed Béarnais took it into his head that by

making trouble between him and his wife, you had no other object than not to pay your sister the dowry you owe her!"

"Oh!"

"My God, yes, that is the idea this devil of a Béarnais got into his head."

"Continue, Chicot, continue," said the King.

"Well, scarcely had he guessed that, before he became as you are now, sad and melancholy."

"Afterwards, Chicot, afterwards?"

"Then that was a diversion to his distraction, and he almost stopped loving Fosseuse."

"Bah!"

"It is as I tell you; he was seized by this other love which I mentioned."

"But is the man a Persian, a pagan, a Turk? Does he practise polygamy? And what did Margot say?"

"This time, my son, you will be surprised, but Margot was delighted."

"At Fosseuse's accident, I can imagine it."

"No, no, delighted on her own account."

"Does she like the profession of midwife?"

"Ah! this time she will not be midwife."

"What will she be?"

"She will be godmother, her husband has promised her, and the sugar-plums are even now on their way."

"In any case he will not buy them with her dowry."

"You think so, my King?"

"Certainly, since I have refused him this dowry. But what is the name of the new mistress?"

"Oh! she is beautiful, and strong, and wears a magnificent girdle; moreover, she is quite capable of withstanding an attack."

"She defended herself?"

"Yes, by Heaven!"

"So that Henry was repulsed with loss?"

"At first."

"Ah! ah! and afterwards?"

"Henry is obstinate; he returned to the charge."

"So that" —

"So that he took her."

"How?"

"By force."

"By force?"

"Yes, with petards."

"What in the devil do you mean, Chicot?"

"The truth."

"Petards! And who is this beauty who can be taken with petards?"

"She is Mademoiselle Cahors."

"Mademoiselle Cahors?"

"Yes, a large, beautiful girl, faith, whom they called a maiden like Péronne. She has one foot on the plain, the other on the mountain, and her tutor is, or rather was, Monsieur de Vesin, a brave gentleman of your acquaintance."

"By Heavens!" cried Henry, enraged; "my town! he has taken my town!"

"Well! you grasp the idea, Henriquet. You were unwilling to give it to him after having promised it; so he had to make up his mind to take it. But, by the way, wait, here is a letter which he charged me to give into your own hands."

Chicot drew a letter from his pocket and presented it to the King.

It was the one Henry had written after the taking of Cahors, and which concluded with these words:

"*Quod mihi dixisti profuit multum; cognosco meos devotos; nosce tuos; Chicotus cætera expediet.*"

Which meant:

"That which you have told me has been very useful to me; I know my friends; know yours; Chicot will tell you the rest."

CHAPTER LXXX.

HOW AFTER HAVING RECEIVED NEWS FROM THE SOUTH HENRY RECEIVED MORE FROM THE NORTH.

The King, at the highest pitch of exasperation, could scarcely read the letter which Chicot had just given him.

While he was deciphering the Latin of the Béarnais with ejaculations of impatience which made the floor shake, Chicot, standing before a long Venetian mirror hung above a gilded dresser, was admiring his looks and the infinite grace of his figure in his uniform.

Infinite is the word, for never had Chicot appeared so tall; his somewhat bald head was surmounted by a conic helmet, in the style of the German headpieces that are chiselled so curiously at Trèves and Mayenne. He was occupied for the time being in replacing over his buff coat, smeared by perspiration and the rubbing of his armor, a demi-cuirass for travelling, which he had put on over his coat for breakfast. Moreover, while buckling his cuirass, his spurs, which were better adapted for disembowelling than for urging on a horse, clanked on the floor.

"Oh! I am betrayed," cried Henry, when he had finished reading the letter, "the Béarnais had a plan and I never suspected it."

"My son," replied Chicot, "you know the proverb: 'Still waters run deep!'"

"Go to hell with your proverbs!"

Chicot started towards the door as if to obey.

"No, remain."

Chicot stopped.

"Cahors taken!" continued Henry.

"And well taken too," said Chicot.

"But then he has generals and engineers."

"No," said Chicot, "the Béarnais is too poor; how would he pay them? No, indeed, he does everything himself."

"And — he fights?" said Henry, somewhat disdainfully.

"To say that, at first, he throws himself into the battle with enthusiasm, I should not dare; he is like those people who test the water before bathing; he wets the tips of his fingers with a little perspiration, which argues ill, prepares his breast with several *mea culpa*, his forehead with philosophical reflections; this takes up the ten minutes which follow the first cannon-shot, after which he rushes headlong into action, and like a salamander fairly swims in molten lead."

"The devil!" said Henry, "the devil!"

"And I assure, you, Henry, it was hot there."

The King rose hastily, and paced the room with long strides.

"This is a blow to me!" he cried, finishing aloud the thought begun within himself. "They will laugh over it. I shall be lampooned. These rogues of Gascons are caustic; I can already hear them sharpening their teeth and their smiles over the horrible airs of their bagpipes. By Heaven! fortunately I had the idea of sending to Francis the help so long

desired. Antwerp will compensate me for the loss of Cahors; the north will efface the blunders of the south."

"Amen!" said Chicot, delicately inserting the tips of his fingers into the sweetmeats of the King, in order to finish his dessert.

Just then the door opened, and the usher announced:

"Monsieur le Comte du Bouchage!"

"Ah!" cried Henry, "I told you so, Chicot, here is my news. Come in, count, come in."

The usher opened the door, and there appeared within its frame, beneath the half-drawn curtain, the young man who had just been announced. He looked like a full length portrait of Holbein or Titian. He advanced slowly, and bent his knee in the middle of the room.

"Still pale," said the King, "still gloomy. Come, my friend, for the time being, don your holiday expression, and do not tell me good news with such a downcast countenance; speak quickly, Du Bouchage, because I am hungry for your story. You come from Flanders, my son?"

"Yes, sire."

"And in haste, I see."

"Sire, as quickly as a man can cover the ground."

"You are welcome. Antwerp? What about Antwerp?"

"Antwerp belongs to the Prince of Orange."

"To the Prince of Orange! What do you mean?"

"To William, if you like that better."

"Ah! but did not my brother march on Antwerp?"

"Yes, sire, but he no longer marches on Antwerp; he is now hastening to Château Thierry."

"He has left the army?"

"There is no longer an army, sire."

"Oh!" said the King, his knees giving way, as he fell back into his armchair, "but Joyeuse?"

"Sire, my brother, after doing wonders with his marines, after covering the whole retreat, rallied the few men escaped from the disaster and made of them an escort for the Duc d'Anjou."

"A defeat!" murmured the King.

Then suddenly, with a strange flash in his eye:

"Then Flanders is lost to my brother?"

"Absolutely, sire."

"Without recall?"

"I fear so."

The forehead of the prince cleared gradually, as if under the influence of a bright thought.

"That poor Francis," said he, smiling; "he has bad luck with his crowns. He failed to get that of Navarre; he stretched his hand towards that of England; he touched that of Flanders; but we will wager, Du Bouchage, that he will never reign. Poor brother, he has so long desired it!"

"Oh, heavens! that is always the way when any one wants a thing," said Chicot, solemnly.

"How many prisoners?" asked the King.

"Almost two thousand."

"How many dead?"

"At least as many; Monsieur de Saint Aignan is among the number."

"So he is dead, that poor Saint Aignan?"

"Drowned."

"Drowned! What! you were thrown into the Scheldt?"

"Not at all; the Scheldt was thrown upon us."

The count then gave the King an exact description of the battle and of the flood. Henry listened from beginning to end with an attitude, a silence, and a face which were not lacking in majesty. Then, when the recital was finished, he rose, and kneeling down before the *priedieu* of his oratory, made his prayer. A minute afterwards he returned, with a perfectly serene countenance.

"There!" said he, "I hope that I take things like a king. A king supported by the Lord is really more than human. Come, count, imitate me, and since your brother as well as mine has been saved, thank God, and let us smile a little."

"I am at your orders, sire."

"What do you wish as the price of your services, Du Bouchage? Speak."

"Sire," said the young man, shaking his head, "I have rendered no services."

"I dispute that, but at all events your brother has rendered some."

"Immense services, sire."

"He has saved the army, you say, or rather the wreck of the army?"

"Among those who remain there is not a single man who will not tell you that he owes his life to my brother."

"Well, Du Bouchage, I desire to extend my favors to you both, and in this I shall imitate the all-powerful Savior who has so clearly protected you by making you alike, that is, rich, brave, and beautiful; moreover, I shall imitate the great politicians always so happily inspired, who were in the habit of rewarding the bearers of bad news."

"Come, now!" said Chicot. "I know instances of messengers hanged for bringing bad news."

"That is possible," said Henry, majestically; "but the senate thanked Varro."

"You cite republicans. Valois, Valois, misfortune makes you humble."

"Come, Du Bouchage, what do you want? What do you desire?"

"Since your Majesty does me the honor of speaking so affectionately to me, I shall venture to take advantage of your kindness. I am tired of life, sire, and yet I have scruples about shortening my life, for God forbids this. All the subterfuges that an honorable man employs in such a case are wicked; men let themselves be killed in battle; allow themselves to die of hunger; forget to swim when they are crossing a river; all these are travesties of suicide through which God sees quite readily, for you know, sire, our most secret thoughts are as clear as day to God. I give up, then, dying before the limit that God has appointed for my life, but the world wearies me, and I would withdraw from it."

"My friend!" said the King.

Chicot raised his head and looked with interest at this young man, so beautiful, so brave, so rich, yet who spoke in such despairing tones.

"Sire," continued the count, resolutely, "all that has happened for some time has strengthened in me this desire. I wish to throw myself into the arms of God, the sovereign consoler of the wretched, as he is likewise the sovereign master of the happy ones on earth. Deign then, sire, to make the way easy or to provide the means for me to enter at once into a religious life, for, as the prophet says, my heart is as heavy as death."

Chicot, that mocking individual, stopped for an instant the incessant play of his arms and features to listen to this lofty grief which spoke so nobly, so sincerely, in the sweetest, most persuasive voice that God ever gave to youth and beauty.

His eye darkened as it met the despairing glance of the brother of Joyeuse. His entire body was relaxed, and yielded in sympathy to this misery which did not seem to have weakened but to have severed every fibre of the body of Du Bouchage.

The King also had felt his heart melt on hearing this sad request.

"Ah! I understand, my friend," said he, "you wish to enter a religious life, but you still feel yourself a man and you fear the trials."

"I do not fear the severe discipline, but the time of probation. No, no, it is not in order to soften the hardships which will be imposed on me, for I hope to spare my body no physical suffering, my mind no moral privation. I wish to take away from both all pretext of returning to the past. In a word, to raise at once the grating which shall separate me forever from the world, and which according to ecclesiastic rules ordinarily rises as slowly as a hedge of thorns.

"Poor boy!" said the King, who had followed the statement of Du Bouchage by scanning, so to speak, each of his words, "poor boy! I think that he will make a good preacher; don't you, Chicot?"

Chicot was silent, and answered nothing.

"You understand, sire, it is in my family that the struggle will occur; it is among my relatives that I shall find the strongest opposition. My brother the cardinal, a good man although worldly, will seek a thousand reasons to make me change my mind, and if he should not succeed in persuading me, as I am sure he will not, he will resort to material impossibilities, and will incite Rome against me, who raises obstacles between each degree of orders. In this your Majesty is all-powerful; in this I shall appreciate the strength of the arm which your Majesty is good enough to raise above me. You asked what I wished, sire; you promised to grant my request. My desire, you see, is all in God; prevail upon Rome to let me dispense with my novitiate."

The King roused himself from his meditation, and with a smile took the count's hand.

"I will do what you ask, my son," said he. "You wish to serve God; you are right; he is a better master than I."

"A fine compliment you are paying him!" murmured Chicot between his teeth.

"Well! so be it," said the King; "you shall be ordained according to your desires, dear count, I promise you."

"Your Majesty overwhelms me with joy!" cried the young man, kissing Henry's hand with as much pleasure as if he had been made duke, peer, or marshal of France. "So the affair is settled?"

"On my word as King, and on my honor as a gentleman," said Henry.

The face of Du Bouchage brightened; something like a smile of ecstasy passed over his lips; he saluted the King respectfully and withdrew.

"There is a happy, a very happy young man!" exclaimed Henry.

"Good!" said Chicot; "but you have nothing to envy him, it seems to me; he is no more to be pitied than you, sire."

"But you understand, Chicot, you understand he is going to be a monk, he is going to give himself to God."

"Well, what the devil prevents your doing the same? He asks a dispensation from his brother the cardinal; but I know a cardinal who will give you all the dispensation necessary; he stands better at Rome than you do. You do not know him? He is the Cardinal de Guise."

"Chicot!"

"And if the tonsure troubles you, and it is a delicate operation, the prettiest hands in the world, and the prettiest scissors of the Rue de la Coutellerie, golden scissors, faith, will give you this precious symbol which will raise to the figure three the number of crowns you shall have worn, and which will justify the motto: "*Manet ultima cœlo.*"

"Pretty hands, you say?"

"Come, now, are you going to say evil of the hands of the Duchess of Montpensier, after having said it of her shoulders? What a king you make, and how severe you are to your subjects!"

The King frowned, and passed across his brow a hand more trembling, to be sure, but as white as those to which Chicot had referred.

"Come, come," said Chicot, "let us leave all this, for I see that the conversation is beginning to weary you; let us return to things which interest me personally."

The King made a gesture half indifferent, half approving. Chicot looked about him, and tipped back his chair on its hind legs.

"Well," said he, in a low voice, "tell me, my son; did these Joyeuses leave *like that* for Flanders?"

"What do you mean by *like that?*"

"I mean that they are so eager, the one for pleasure, the other for sadness, that it seems to me surprising that they should have left Paris without making any noise, the one to amuse himself, the other to divert his thoughts."

"Well?"

"Well! as you are the best of friends, you ought to know how they went away."

"Certainly I know."

"Then tell me, Henriquet, have you heard it said" —

Chicot paused.

"What?"

"That they fought any one of importance, for instance?"

"I have not heard."

"Did they abduct any woman with violence and pistols?"

"Not that I know of."

"Did they chance to burn anything?"

"What?"

"How do I know what? A great lord burns the house of a poor devil for amusement, for instance."

"Are you mad, Chicot? Burn a house in my city of Paris? Would any one dare to do such a thing?"

"Ah! yes, they do not stand on ceremony."

"Chicot!"

"In short, have they done nothing to cause you to hear noise or see smoke?"

"Faith, no."

"So much the better!" said Chicot, breathing with an ease which he had not felt since he had begun the questioning to which he had just subjected Henry.

"Do you know one thing, Chicot?" said Henry.

"No."

"You are becoming wicked."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"My sojourn in the tomb sweetened me, great King, but your presence *sours* me. *Omnia letho putrescunt.*"

"That is to say, I am mouldy?" asked the King.

"Somewhat, my son, somewhat."

"You are becoming insupportable, Chicot; and I attribute

to you projects of intrigue and ambition which I thought far from your character."

"Ambitious plans, I! Chicot ambitious! Henriquet, my son, you used to be only simple, but you are growing foolish. You are progressing."

"And I tell you, Monsieur Chicot, that you want to entice all my servants away from me, by attributing them with intentions which they have not, with crimes of which they have not thought; I say that you wish to monopolize me, in short!"

"Monopolize you! I!" cried Chicot. "Monopolize you! For what reason? God keep me from it, for you are too troublesome, *bone Deus!* Without counting the fact that you are as hard to please in regard to food as the devil — Oh! no, no, the idea!"

"Humph!" said the King.

"Come, tell me where you got such a strange notion?"

"You began by listening very indifferently to my praises of your old friend Dom Modeste, to whom you owe a great deal."

"I? I owe a great deal to Dom Modeste? Good, good, good! and afterwards?"

"Afterwards you tried to calumniate my Joyeuses, two very true friends."

"I do not deny it."

"Then you laid your heavy claw on the De Guises."

"Ah! you love them too, just now, do you? This is one of your days for loving every one, apparently."

"No, I do not love them; but as at present they keep themselves quiet, and hidden; as just now they are not doing me the least harm; as I do not lose sight of them for an instant; as I always notice in them the same coldness; and as I am not in the habit of being afraid of statues, threatening as they may be, I keep to those whose faces and attitudes I know. You see, Chicot, a phantom, when it has become familiar, is an insufferable companion. All these De Guises with their wild looks and their long swords are people of my kingdom who, up to the present time, have done me very little wrong; and they resemble — shall I tell you what?"

"Yes, Henriquet, it will please me; you well know that you are full of subtleties in your comparisons."

"They resemble the perches that are left in the ponds to chase away the big fish and prevent them from getting too fat; but suppose for an instant that the big fish are not afraid."

"Well?"

"They have not teeth enough to bite into their scales."

"Oh, Henry, my son, how subtle you are!"

"While your Béarnais" —

"Come, have you a comparison for the Béarnais, too?"

"While your Béarnais, who mews like a cat, bites like a tiger" —

"On my life!" exclaimed Chicot, "here is a Valois who lies in wait for a De Guise! Come, come, my son, you have too good a start to stop. Divorce your wife at once and marry Madame de Montpensier; at least you will have a chance with her, for if you do not give her children, she will give you some; was she not once in love with you?"

Henry drew himself up.

"Yes," said he, "but I was otherwise occupied; there lies the source of all my threats. Chicot, you have put your finger on the spot; she has a woman's spite against me, and now and then sets me on edge, but fortunately I am a man, and I have but to laugh."

Henry uttered these words as he pulled up his collar, turned down in the Italian style, when the usher, Nambu, announced from the doorway:

"A messenger for his Majesty from the Duc de Guise."

"Is he a courier or a gentleman?" asked the King.

"He is a captain, sire."

"By my faith! let him come in, and he shall be welcome."

At the same time a captain of gendarmes entered, wearing the campaign uniform, and gave the customary salute.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE TWO COMRADES.

At this announcement, Chicot sat down and, according to his habit, impertinently turned his back to the door. With his eyes half veiled, he buried himself in one of those meditations which were so habitual to him, when the first words uttered by the messenger from the De Guises caused him to start. Consequently he opened his eyes. Fortunately, or

unfortunately, the King, occupied with the newcomer, paid no attention to this show of fright on the part of Chicot.

The messenger stood ten feet from the armchair in which Chicot had disappeared, and as Chicot's profile scarcely rose above the ornaments of the chair, Chicot saw the messenger perfectly, while the messenger could see only Chicot's eye.

"You come from Lorraine?" asked the King of the messenger, whose figure was dignified and whose bearing quite warlike.

"No, sire, but from Soissons, where Monsieur le Duc, who has not left the city for a month, gave me this letter, which I have the honor of laying at your Majesty's feet."

Chicot's eyes sparkled, and did not lose a gesture of the newcomer, as his ears did not lose a word.

The messenger opened his buff coat fastened with silver clasps, and drew from a leather bag, which was lined with silk, and worn over his heart, not one letter, but two, for one dragged the other out with it, being attached to it by the wax of its seal, so that as the captain drew out one, the other dropped on the carpet.

Chicot's eye followed the fall of this letter as the eye of a cat follows the flight of a bird. As it fell he saw the color mount to the cheeks of the messenger, and his embarrassment as he picked it up as well as when he handed the first one to the King.

But Henry saw nothing; Henry, a model of confidence, paid no attention to anything. He merely opened the letter that had been handed to him and read.

Seeing the King absorbed in reading, the messenger gazed intently at him, striving to find on his face the reflection of every thought which the letter might rouse in his mind.

"Ah! Maître Borromée, Maître Borromée!" murmured Chicot, following each movement of Monsieur de Guise's confidant. "Ah! you are a captain, and you give only one letter to the King when you have two letters in your pocket; just wait, my darling, wait."

"That is good, very good!" said the King, re-reading every line of the duke's letter with evident satisfaction; "you may go, captain, and say to Monsieur de Guise that I appreciate the offer he makes me."

"Will not your Majesty honor me with a written answer?" asked the messenger.

"No; I will send one in a month or six weeks, when I will thank him myself. Go!"

The captain bowed and left the apartment.

"You see, Chicot," said the King to his companion, whom he still thought in the depths of his armchair, "you see clearly that Monsieur de Guise is innocent of all machination. The brave duke has heard about the Navarre affair. He fears the Huguenots will grow bold and raise their heads, for he has learned that the Germans already wish to send aid to the King of Navarre. Now, what does he do? Guess what he does."

Chicot did not answer. Henry thought he was waiting for an explanation.

"Well," he continued, "he offers me the army which he has just raised in Lorraine to watch over Flanders, and he tells me that in six weeks this army, with its general, will be entirely at my disposal. What do you say to that, Chicot?"

Absolute silence on the part of the Gascon.

"Truly, my dear Chicot," continued the King, "you are so absurd, my friend; you are as obstinate as a Spanish mule, and if one is unfortunate enough to convince you of a mistake, which often happens, you sulk. Well, yes, you sulk, like the fool that you are."

Not a breath contradicted Henry in the statement which he had just uttered so frankly concerning his friend.

There was something which displeased Henry still more than this obstinacy; it was the silence.

"I think," said he, "that the fellow has had the impertinence to fall asleep. Chicot!" he continued, advancing towards the armchair, "your King is speaking to you; will you answer him?"

But Chicot could not answer, for he was no longer there. Henry found the chair empty.

His eyes searched the entire room; the Gascon was there no more than in the chair.

His helmet had disappeared with him.

The King was seized with a sort of superstitious terror; the thought sometimes passed through his mind that Chicot was superhuman, some diabolic incarnation, — kind it is true, but diabolic.

He summoned Nambu. Nambu had nothing in common with Henry. He was strong-minded, on the contrary, as is

generally the case with those who guard the antechambers of kings. He believed in appearances and disappearances; he had seen many of them, but it was the appearances and disappearances of the living, not of the dead.

Nambu positively assured his Majesty that he had seen Chicot leave five minutes before the messenger from Monsieur le Duc de Guise had gone out. But he had left quietly and with the precaution of a man who does not wish to be seen.

"Evidently," said Henry, passing into his oratory, "Chicot is angry at having been in the wrong. How petty men are, my God! I say this about all of them, even the most spiritual."

Maître Nambu was right. Chicot, his helmet on his head, and stiffened by his long sword, had passed noiselessly through the antechamber; but his precaution had failed to keep his spurs from striking on the stairs which led from the apartments to the gate of the Louvre; the sound caused many to turn round, and cost Chicot many bows, for they knew Chicot's position with the King, and gave him a lower bow than they would have given the Duc d'Anjou.

In an angle of the gate, Chicot stopped to fasten a spur.

The captain of Monsieur de Guise, as we have said, had left scarcely five minutes after Chicot, to whom he had paid no attention. He descended the steps and crossed the court, at once proud and delighted; proud because on the whole he was not a bad-looking soldier, and it pleased him to parade his grace before the Swiss and the guards of his very Christian Majesty; delighted because the King had received him in a manner which showed that he had no suspicion of Monsieur de Guise. As he passed through the gate of the Louvre, and crossed the drawbridge, he was attracted by the clanking of spurs which seemed to be the echo of his own. He turned, thinking that perhaps the King had sent some one after him. Great was his surprise on recognizing, under the turned up points of his helmet, the kindly face and demure features of the bourgeois Robert Briquet, his cursed acquaintance.

It may be remembered that the feeling of the two men for each other was not precisely one of sympathy.

Borromée opened his mouth half a foot wide, as Rabelais said, and thinking that the man behind wished to speak to him, he stopped, so that in two strides Chicot overtook him.

We know what Chicot's strides were.

"*Corbœuf!*" exclaimed Borromée.

"*Ventre de biche!*" cried Chicot.

"My gentle bourgeois!"

"My reverend father!"

"In this helmet!"

"In this buff coat!"

"It is delightful to see you!"

"It is a satisfaction to have met you!"

And the two bullies looked at each other for several seconds with the hostile hesitation of two cocks about to fight, and which, to intimidate each other, rise on their spurs.

Borromée was the first to change from grave to gay. The muscles of his face relaxed, and with an air of warlike frankness and amiable suavity:

"Great God!" said he, "you are a sly dog, Maître Robert Briquet."

"I, reverend father?" replied Chicot. "Why do you call me that, please?"

"Because at the convent of the Jacobins you gave me to understand that you were only a simple bourgeois. In truth, you must be ten times more cunning and brave than a lawyer and a captain together."

Chicot felt that the compliment came from the lips and not from the heart.

"Ah! ah!" replied he, good-humoredly, "and what must we say of you, Seigneur Borromée?"

"Of me?"

"Yes, of you."

"Why?"

"For making me believe that you were only a monk. In truth, you must be ten times more cunning than the pope himself; and, comrade, I do not underrate you by saying this, for the pope is, believe me, a fierce inventor of intrigue, nowadays."

"Do you believe what you say?" asked Borromée.

"*Ventre de biche!* Do I ever lie?"

"Well, touch this."

And he extended his hand to Chicot.

"Ah! you abused me at the convent, brother captain," said Chicot.

"I took you for a bourgeois, my dear fellow, and you know the feeling we swordsmen have for bourgeois."

"That is true," said Chicot, laughing, "it is like monks, and yet you have caught me in a snare."

"A snare?"

"Yes; for in this disguise you laid a snare. A brave captain like you does not exchange his cuirass for a frock without a good reason."

"From a swordsman," said Borromée, "I will have no secrets. Well, yes; I have certain personal interests in the convent of the Jacobins; and you?"

"I too," said Chicot; "but hush!"

"Let us talk a little about it, will you?"

"Upon my soul, I am trying to do so."

"Do you like good wine?"

"Yes, when it is good."

"Well, I know a small inn, which I consider unrivalled in Paris."

"And I know one also," said Chicot. "What is the name of yours?"

"*La Corne d'Abondance.*"

"Ah! ah!" cried Chicot, with a start.

"Well! what is the matter now?"

"Nothing."

"Have you anything against this inn?"

"No; quite the contrary."

"You know it?"

"Not at all; and I wonder at this."

"Would you care to go there with me, comrade?"

"Why, yes, at once."

"Come, then."

"Where is it?"

"Near the Porte Bourdelle. The host is an old wine-bibber who understands perfectly the difference between the palate of a man like you and the throat of a thirsty passer-by."

"Can we converse there at our ease?"

"In the cellar, if we wish."

"And without being disturbed?"

"We will close the door."

"Well," said Chicot, "I see that you are a man of resource, and as well known in inns as in convents."

"Do you suppose I have an understanding with the host?"

"It looks so."

"Faith, no; this time you are wrong. Maître Bonhomet

sends me wine when I wish, and I pay him when I can; that is all."

"Bonhomet?" said Chicot. "On my word, that is a promising name."

"And one which holds. Come, comrade, come."

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot to himself, following the false monk. "Now, you will have to choose among your best grimaces, friend Chicot; for if Bonhomet recognizes you immediately, it is all over with you, and you are nothing but a fool."

CHAPTER LXXXII.

LA CORNE D'ABONDANCE.

The road along which Borromée led Chicot, without suspecting that the latter knew it as well as he himself, recalled to our Gascon the happy days of his youth.

How many times, with head empty, limbs supple, and arms hanging down or swinging, as the admirable popular slang says, how many times had Chicot, beneath a ray of winter sunlight or in the fresh shade of summer, sought this house of *La Corne d'Abondance*, to which a stranger was now leading him.

Then, some pieces of gold, and even silver, jingling in his purse made him happier than a king; he gave himself up to the pleasing delight of idling, as much as seemed good to him, to him who had neither mistress nor lodging, neither a child starving at the door nor suspicious and scolding parents behind the window.

Then Chicot would seat himself carelessly on the wooden bench or stool of the inn to wait for Gorenflot; or rather he would find Gorenflot waiting for him, punctual to the first fumes of the repast.

Then Gorenflot's eye would grow animated, and Chicot, always intelligent and observing, always the anatomist, would study each phase of his friend's intoxication, pondering on that curious nature through the subtle vapor of a reasonable emotion; and under the influence of good wine, warmth, and liberty, youth would mount to his brain, splendid, victorious, and full of consolation.

As he passed before the Bussy cross-roads Chicot raised himself on his toes to try and see the house which he had entrusted to the care of Rémy, but the street was winding, and to stop would not have been good policy. Therefore, with a sigh, he followed Captain Borromée.

Before long the great street of Saint Jacques appeared before him, then the monastery of Saint Benoît, and almost opposite the latter, the inn of the *Corne d'Abondance.* The latter was somewhat aged, somewhat rusty, somewhat cracked; but was still shaded by plantains and chestnut trees on the outside, and within, furnished with bright pewter pots and saucepans, shining imitations of gold and silver for drinkers and gourmands, which drew the real gold and silver into the pocket of the inn-keeper by sympathetic rays, for which nature alone was responsible.

After glancing from the doorway to the house Chicot bent his back so that he lost six inches of his height, which was already lessened in the presence of the captain, assumed a satirical grimace very different from his frank expression and the honest play of his features, and prepared to face his ancient host, Maître Bonhomet. But, as Borromée went ahead in order to show the way, at sight of the two helmets Maître Bonhomet troubled only to look at the first. If the façade of the *Corne d'Abondance* was cracked, the face of the worthy innkeeper, also, had suffered the ravages of time. Besides the wrinkles, which on the human countenance correspond to the cracks caused by time on the front of monuments, Maître Bonhomet had assumed an air of importance, which to every one except swordsmen rendered him difficult of approach, and which hardened his face.

Now, Bonhomet always respected the sword; it was his weakness. He had contracted the habit in a quarter removed from all municipal surveillance, under the influence of peaceful Benedictine monks.

In short, if a quarrel chanced to arise in this glorious inn, before one could have reached the counterscarp in search of the Swiss or the archers of the watch, the sword would already have acted, and in such a way as to puncture several doublets. Bonhomet had been responsible for this mischief seven or eight times, and each time it had cost him a hundred pounds. He respected the sword, therefore, in accordance with the principle that fear creates respect. As to the other patrons of the

Corne d'Abondance, students, clerks, monks, and merchants, Bonhomet managed them without assistance. He had acquired a certain celebrity in putting a large wooden bucket on the heads of the reluctant or dishonest payers, and this act always kept at his side certain pillars of the inn whom he had chosen from among the strongest men of the neighboring shops.

For the rest, they knew the wine was pure and good, and each man had the right to bring it from the cellar himself; they well knew the forbearance of the host in regard to certain matters of credit, and no one murmured at his fantastic whims.

These whims were attributed by some old patrons to the great trouble in Maître Bonhomet's own household. Such at least was the explanation which Borromée thought he should give to Chicot as to the character of the host, whose hospitality they were about to enjoy together.

The misanthropy of Bonhomet had had an unfortunate result on the decoration and comfort of the inn. In short the innkeeper, thinking himself far above his patrons, gave no care to the embellishment of his tavern. The result was that on entering the room Chicot recognized it at once. Nothing was changed except the smoky hue of the ceiling which from gray had turned to black.

In those happy days the inns had not yet contracted the strong, heavy odor of burned tobacco with which the wainscoting and the draperies of rooms are impregnated nowadays; an odor which is absorbed and exhaled by everything which is porous and spongy.

The result of this was that in spite of its venerable dirt and its dilapidated appearance the room of the *Corne d'Abondance* did not annoy by extraneous odors. The fumes of wine had penetrated every nook of the establishment, so that, if we may be permitted to say so, a true drinker found pleasure in this temple of the god Bacchus, for it breathed forth the aroma and incense dearest to the god. Chicot walked behind Borromée, as we have said, and was neither seen nor recognized by the host of the *Corne d'Abondance.*

He knew the darkest corner of the living room, and he started to take possession of it as though he had known no other, when Borromée suddenly stopped him.

"Very fine, my friend!" said he, "but there is a little corner behind this partition in which two men can secretly and

honestly converse after drinking, and even while they are drinking."

"Come on," said Chicot.

Borromée made a sign to the host which meant:

"Comrade, is the small room vacant?"

Bonhomet replied by another sign which meant:

"It is."

Borromée led Chicot, who pretended to run against every corner of the hall, to the little room so well known to those of our readers who have been kind enough to waste their time reading *La Dame de Monsoreau*.

"There!" said Borromée, "wait for me here while I take advantage of a privilege given to the frequenters of this inn, and which you will enjoy when you are better known."

"What is that?" asked Chicot.

"To go myself to the cellar and choose the wine which we are going to drink."

"Ah! ah!" said Chicot; "a pleasant privilege. Go."

Borromée disappeared.

Chicot's eyes followed him; then, as soon as the door was closed, he raised from the wall a representation of the Assassination of Credit, murdered by poor payers.

This picture was framed in black wood, and made a companion piece to another, representing a dozen poor wretches pulling the devil by the tail.

Behind this there was a hole through which one could see into the large room without being seen.

Chicot knew this hole, for it was of his own making.

"Ah! ah!" said he, "you are leading me to an inn of which you are a constant frequenter; you bring me into a corner in which you think I cannot be seen, and from which you think I cannot see, and in this corner is a hole, thanks to which you will not make a gesture without my seeing it. Come, come, my captain, you are not over bright."

As he uttered these words with his usual air of scorn, Chicot put his eye to the aperture, artistically bored through a defect of the wood.

Through this hole he perceived Borromée first put his finger cautiously on his lips, then speak to Bonhomet, who apparently acquiesced in his wishes by a nod of his Olympian head.

At the movement of the captain's lips, Chicot, an expert in such matters, guessed that the words uttered by him meant:

"Serve us in this little room, and whatever noise you hear do not enter."

After this Borromée took a lamp which was always burning on a table, raised a trap-door, and descended to the cellar, taking advantage of the most precious privilege accorded to the patrons of the inn.

Chicot immediately gave his peculiar knock on the wall.

On hearing the sound, which must have recalled some memory deeply hidden in his heart, Bonhomet trembled, looked around, and listened.

Chicot knocked a second time like a man who wonders why his first knock was not obeyed.

Bonhomet hastened to the little room and found Chicot standing, a threatening look on his face.

At sight of him Bonhomet gave a cry; like every one he had supposed Chicot dead, and so thought he stood face to face with his ghost.

"My good fellow, why and since when do you force men of my quality to knock twice?"

"Oh! dear Monsieur Chicot," said Bonhomet, "is it you or only your spirit?"

"Whether it is I or my spirit," said Chicot, "now that you recognize me, my good man, I hope you will obey me in every particular."

"Oh! certainly, my dear lord, give your orders."

"Whatever noise you may hear in this room, Maître Bonhomet, and whatever takes place here, I hope you will wait until I call before you come."

"That will be very easy, dear Monsieur Chicot, as it is just what your companion has asked me to do."

"Yes, but I am the one who will call, you understand; if he should call let it be as though you had heard nothing."

"That is settled, Monsieur Chicot."

"Very good; and now, under some pretext or other, send away your other clients so that in ten minutes we may be as free and as much by ourselves as if we had come to hold a feast on Good Friday."

"In ten minutes, my lord Chicot, there shall not be a soul in the whole inn except your humble servant."

"Go, Bonhomet, go. You have retained all my esteem," said Chicot, majestically.

"Oh! my God! my God!" said Bonhomet, withdrawing. "What is going to happen in my poor house?"

As he went out he met Borromée returning from the cellar with his bottles.

"You understand?" said the latter; "in ten minutes not a soul must be in this inn."

Bonhomet, usually so scornful, nodded in sign of obedience, and retired to his kitchen, in order to consider a means of fulfilling the double injunction of his two formidable customers.

Borromée entered the small room and found Chicot waiting for him, a smile on his lips.

We are ignorant of how Maître Bonhomet managed; but at the end of ten minutes the last student had crossed the threshold, giving his arm to the last clerk and saying:

"Oh! oh! the day is stormy at Maître Bonhomet's; let us decamp, or beware the hail."

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE SMALL ROOM OF MAÎTRE BONHOMET'S INN.

As the captain entered the small room with a basket of a dozen bottles in his hand, Chicot received him in so open and smiling a manner that Borromée was tempted to look on him as a simpleton. Borromée hastened to uncork the bottles which he had brought from the cellar; but his haste was nothing to Chicot's. So the preparations did not take long. The two companions, like experienced drinkers, sent for some salty food, with the laudable object of preventing their thirst from slacking. These relishes were brought by Bonhomet, at whom each drinker glanced. Bonhomet replied to each look; but if any one had been able to judge of those two glances, he would have found a great difference between the one given to Borromée and that given to Chicot.

Bonhomet withdrew and the two companions began to drink. At first, as if the occupation was too important to be interrupted,

the two drinkers swallowed a goodly number of bumpers without exchanging a single word.

Chicot, especially, was wonderful; without having said anything but "Faith, this is fine Burgundy!" and "On my soul, you are an excellent fellow!" he had swallowed two bottles; that is, one bottle for each remark.

"By Heaven!" murmured Borromée, aside, "it is strange, my meeting such a drinker."

At the third bottle Chicot raised his eyes to Heaven.

"Truly," said he, "we are drinking hard enough to become intoxicated."

"Good! this sausage is so salt!" said Borromée.

"Ah! that pleases you," said Chicot; "let us continue, my friend; I have a strong head."

And each again emptied his bottle.

The wine produced an entirely different effect on the two companions. It loosened the tongue of Chicot, and tied that of Borromée.

"Ah!" murmured Chicot, "you are silent, my friend; you distrust yourself."

"Ah!" said Borromée, in a low tone, "you brag, so you are getting tipsy. How many bottles does it take, comrade?" asked Borromée.

"For what?" asked Chicot.

"To become gay?"

"I reckon on four."

"And to get tipsy?"

"Say six."

"And to get drunk?"

"Let us double the number."

"A Gascon!" thought Borromée; "he is beginning to stammer and he is only at the fourth bottle. In that case we have a margin," said he, drawing from the basket a fifth bottle for himself and a fifth for Chicot.

But Chicot noticed that some of the five bottles ranged at Borromée's right were half empty, others three-quarters, but that not one was wholly empty. This confirmed the idea which had first come to him that the captain had evil intentions regarding him.

He rose to take the fifth bottle which Borromée held out to him, and swayed on his legs.

"Good!" said he; "you felt it?"

"What?"

"The shock of an earthquake."

"Bah!"

"Yes, *ventre de biche!* Fortunately the inn of the *Corne d'Abondance* is solid, although built on a pivot."

"What! built on a pivot?" said Borromée.

"Certainly, since it turns around."

"That is so," said Borromée, emptying his glass to the last drop; "I felt the effect, but did not know the cause."

"Because you are not a Latin scholar," said Chicot; "because you have not read the treatise *De Naturâ Rerum.* If you had read this you would know that there is no effect without a cause."

"Well, my dear comrade," said Borromée, "for, like me, you are a captain, are you not?"

"A captain from the tips of my toes to the top of my head," replied Chicot.

"Well, my dear captain," said Borromée, "tell me, since as you say there is no effect without a cause, tell me what was the cause of your disguise?"

"Of what disguise?"

"Of the one you wore when you came to Dom Modeste."

"How was I disguised?"

"As a bourgeois."

"Ah! that is so."

"Tell me this and you will begin my education in philosophy."

"Willingly; but you will tell me, in turn, will you not, why you were disguised as a monk? Confidence for confidence."

"Agreed!" said Borromée.

"Take this," said Chicot, and he held out his hand to the captain.

The latter grasped Chicot's hand heavily.

"My turn now," said Chicot.

And he touched Borromée's hand.

"Good!" said the latter.

"You want to know why I was disguised as a bourgeois?" asked Chicot, with a tongue which was growing thicker and thicker.

"Yes, that puzzles me."

"And you will tell me in your turn?"

"On my faith as a captain; is it not settled?"

"That is true, I had forgotten. Well, it is very easy to understand."

"Tell me, then."

"In two words you will know the whole story."

"I am listening."

"I was spying for the King."

"You were spying?"

"Yes."

"You are a spy by profession?"

"No, merely in an amateur way."

"What were you spying at Dom Modeste's?"

"Everything. In the first place I was spying Dom Modeste; then Brother Borromée; then little Jacques; then the entire convent."

"And what did you discover, my worthy friend?"

"First I discovered that Dom Modeste is a big fool."

"It was not necessary to be clever for that."

"Pardon! pardon! His Majesty Henry III., who is no fool, looks upon him as the light of the Church, and is thinking of making him a bishop."

"Be it so, I have nothing to say against such a promotion; on the contrary, I shall laugh heartily that day. And what further did you discover?"

"I discovered that Brother Borromée was not a monk, but a captain."

"Ah, indeed! you discovered that?"

"At first glance."

"And next?"

"I discovered that little Jacques was practising with foils while waiting for the time to come when he should fence with the sword, and that he was aiming at a target until time for him to aim at a man."

"Ah! you discovered that!" said Borromée, frowning. "And next, what more did you discover?"

"Oh! give me some wine; otherwise I can remember nothing more."

"You notice that you are beginning on the sixth bottle," said Borromée, laughing.

"And I am getting tipsy," said Chicot; "I do not pretend otherwise; but did we come here to philosophize?"

"We came here to drink."

"Let us drink, then!"

And Chicot filled his glass.

"Well!" said Borromée, when he had approved of Chicot.

"Do you remember?"

"What?"

"What else you saw in the convent?"

"I should think so!" exclaimed Chicot.

"Well! what did you see?"

"I saw that the monks, instead of being priests, were old soldiers, and that instead of obeying Dom Modeste they were obeying you. That is what I saw."

"Indeed! But probably that was not all?"

"No; but wine, wine, wine, or my memory will fail me."

And as Chicot's bottle was empty, he held out his glass to Borromée, who filled it from his own.

Chicot emptied his glass without taking breath.

"Well! do we remember?" asked Borromée.

"Do we remember! I should think so!"

"What further did you see?"

"I saw that there was a plot on hand."

"A plot!" cried Borromée, turning pale.

"Yes, a plot," said Chicot.

"Against whom?"

"Against the King."

"With what object?"

"With the object of abducting him."

"When?"

"When he returned from Vincennes."

"Thunder!"

"Beg pardon?"

"Nothing. So you saw that?"

"I saw that."

"And you warned the King of it?"

"By Heaven! since I came for that purpose!"

"In that case, you are the one who caused the failure of the plot?"

"I am the one," said Chicot.

"Murder!" muttered Borromée, between his teeth.

"You say?" demanded Chicot.

"I say that you have good eyes, my friend."

"Bah!" replied Chicot, stammering, "I saw other things, too. Hand me one of your bottles and I will astonish you when I tell you what I saw."

Borromée hastened to comply with Chicot's request.

"Now," said he, "astonish me."

"In the first place," said Chicot, "I saw Monsieur de Mayenne wounded."

"Bah!"

"Yes, I did; I met him on the road. Then I saw Cahors taken."

"What! you saw Cahors taken? You come from Cahors, then?"

"Certainly. Ah! captain, it was a fine sight, in truth, and a brave fellow like you would have been delighted at the spectacle."

"I do not doubt it. You were with the King of Navarre, then?"

"We were side by side, dear friend, as you and I are now."

"And you left him?"

"To announce the news to the King of France."

"And you have just come from the Louvre?"

"A quarter of an hour before you."

"Then as we have not been apart since then, I will not ask you what you have seen since our meeting in the Louvre."

"On the contrary, do ask me; for on my word, that is most interesting of all."

"Tell it, then."

"Tell! tell!" said Chicot; "*ventre de biche;* it is very easy to say 'tell!'"

"Make an effort."

"Another glass to untie my tongue — a full one; good! Well, I saw, comrade, that in taking from your pocket the letter from his highness the Duc de Guise you let fall another."

"Another!" cried Borromée, with a start.

"Yes," said Chicot; "and it is there."

Chicot made two or three attempts with an unsteady hand, and finally placed the tip of his finger on the buff doublet of Borromée, over the spot where the letter was concealed. Borromée shuddered as if Chicot's finger had been a red hot iron which had touched his breast instead of his doublet.

"Oh! oh!" said he; "there is just one thing lacking."

"To what?"

"To all that you have seen."

"What is that?"

"That you know to whom this letter is addressed."

"Oh, I know perfectly well!" said Chicot, resting both arms on the table. "It is addressed to the Duchess of Montpensier."

"Blood of Christ!" cried Borromée, "and you said nothing about this to the King, I hope?"

"Not a word, but I shall."

"When?"

"When I have had a nap," said Chicot.

And he laid his head on his arms, as he had previously rested his arms on the table.

"Ah! you know that I have a letter for the duchess?" said the captain, in a choked voice.

"I know that perfectly," echoed Chicot.

"And if you could stand on your legs, you would go to the Louvre?"

"I should go to the Louvre."

"And you would denounce me?"

"And I should denounce you."

"So that this is not a joke?"

"What?"

"That as soon as your nap is over" —

"Well?"

"The King will know everything."

"Why, my dear friend," said Chicot, raising his head and looking at Borromée with a weary air; "understand the case: You are a conspirator; I a spy. I have so much for each plot I expose. You weave a plot; I denounce you. Each follows his trade, that is all. Good-night, captain."

As he spoke, not only did Chicot resume his first position, but he settled himself on his chair and on the table in such a way that the front of his head was buried in his hands and the rest of it protected by his helmet. The only portion exposed was his back.

And this back, freed from its cuirass, which lay on a chair, was pleasingly rounded.

"Ah!" said Borromée, fixing on his companion a flashing eye, "ah! you will denounce me, dear friend!"

"As soon as I wake, dear friend; that is understood," said Chicot.

"But we shall see if you ever wake!" cried Borromée.

And he dealt a furious blow of the dagger at his companion

of the bottle, thinking he would pierce him through and through and nail him to the table.

But Borromée had counted without the coat of mail which Chicot had borrowed from the armory of Dom Modeste. The dagger broke like glass against the brave metal, which for the second time had saved Chicot's life.

Moreover, before the assassin had recovered from his astonishment, Chicot's right arm, unbending like a spring, described a semi-circle and gave a mighty blow with its fist on the face of Borromée, who rolled against the wall, bloody and bruised.

In an instant he was on his feet; another second and he had his sword in his hand. These two seconds were sufficient for Chicot in turn to rise and unsheath his sword.

All the vapors of the wine were dispelled as if by magic. Chicot stood half thrown back on his left leg, his eye steady, his wrist firm and ready to receive his enemy.

The table, like a battlefield, on which lay the empty bottles, stood between the two adversaries and served as a barricade for each.

But the sight of the blood running down his nose, and from his face to the floor, enraged Borromée, and, losing all prudence, he rushed at his enemy, coming as near to him as the table would allow.

"Brute!" cried Chicot, "you see very well that it is you who are drunk, for you cannot reach from one side of the table to the other, while my arm is six inches longer than your arm and my sword is six inches longer than your sword. This will prove it!"

And Chicot, without even lunging, extended his arm with the rapidity of lightning and touched Borromée in the middle of his forehead. The latter gave a cry, more from rage than pain, and as, all things considered, he was very brave, he redoubled the fury of his attack.

Chicot, still at the other side of the table, took a chair and calmly sat down.

"My God! how stupid these soldiers are!" said he, shrugging his shoulders. "This one pretends to know how to handle a sword, and the most insignificant bourgeois, if he wished, would kill him and his comrades like flies. Well! well! he is going to put my eyes out now. Ah! you are getting on the table; good! that was the only thing lacking. But take care,

beaten ass that you are, upward thrusts are terrible, and if I wanted to I could spit you like a lark."

And he touched Borromée's stomach as he had touched his forehead.

Borromée roared with fury, and jumped from the table.

"Good!" cried Chicot; "now we are on level ground, and can talk as we fence. Ah! captain, captain, we sometimes assassinate like this, in our spare moments between two plots."

"I do for my cause what you do for yours," said Borromée, brought back to serious thoughts, and frightened in spite of himself at the dull fire which burned in Chicot's eyes.

"That is talking," said Chicot, "and yet, friend, I see with pleasure that I am worth more than you. Ah! not bad."

Borromée had just given Chicot a blow which grazed his breast.

"Not bad, but I know the thrust; it is the one you showed to little Jacques. I said then that I was worth more than you, my friend, for I did not begin the fight, however much I might have wished to do so. Moreover, I let you carry out your plan by giving you every latitude, and even now I am simply parrying. This is because I have a compromise to suggest to you."

"Nothing!" cried Borromée, exasperated at Chicot's calmness, "nothing!"

And he made a thrust which would have pierced the Gascon through and through if the latter had not used his long legs and stepped back out of reach of his adversary.

"Still I am going to tell you this plan, so that I may have nothing to reproach myself with."

"Keep still!" said Borromée, "it is useless, keep still!"

"Listen," said Chicot, "it is for my conscience' sake. I am not thirsty for your blood, do you understand? and I wish to kill you only as a last resort."

"Kill me, kill me if you can!" cried Borromée, exasperated.

"No. Once in my life I killed another swordsman like you, I might even say a better swordsman than you. By Heaven! you know him, he too belonged to the house of De Guise, and was a lawyer."

"Ah! Nicolas David!" murmured Borromée, frightened at the knowledge, and putting himself on the defensive.

"Exactly."

"Ah! it was you who killed him?"

"Oh! my God, yes, with a pretty little thrust which I am going to show you, unless you accept the compromise."

"Well! what is your plan; let me hear?"

"You will pass from the service of the Duc de Guise into that of the King, but without leaving that of the Duc de Guise."

"That is, I am to be a spy like yourself?"

"No; there would be a difference. I am not paid and you would be. You will begin by showing me the letter from Monsieur le Duc de Guise to Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier. You will let me make a copy of it, and I will leave you in peace until the next time. So, am I kind?"

"Wait," said Borromée, "this is my answer."

Borromée's answer was a blow given so rapidly that the point of the sword grazed Chicot's shoulder.

"Come, come," said Chicot, "I see clearly that it is absolutely necessary for me to show Nicolas David's thrust; it is very simple and pretty."

And Chicot, who, until then, had kept on the defensive, took a step forward and attacked in turn.

"This is it," said Chicot, "I make a feint like this."

He made it. Borromée parried by drawing back; but, after the first step, he was forced to stop, for the wall was behind him.

"Good! that 's it, you parry the circle; that is wrong, for my wrist is better than yours. I catch the sword, I return *en tierce haute*, I lunge, you are touched, or rather you are dead."

In short, the thrust had followed, or accompanied, the demonstration, and the slender rapier penetrated the breast of Borromée and glided like a needle between two of his ribs sinking deep and with a dull sound into the wall. Borromée threw out his arm and dropped his sword; his bloody eyes dilated, his lips opened, a red foam appeared on them, his head fell over his shoulder with a sigh which resembled a death-rattle. Then his limbs gave way, and his body, in falling, enlarged the cut made by the sword, but did not detach it from the wall, held as it was by the infernal wrist of Chicot. Thus the unhappy wretch, like a gigantic butterfly, remained nailed to the wall, while his feet jerked noisily.

Chicot, cold and impassible, as he always was in a crisis, especially when in the depths of his heart he had the conviction that he had done everything prescribed by his conscience,

let go of the sword, which remained fixed horizontally, unfastened the captain's belt, and searching his doublet, took out the letter and read the address :

The Duchess of Montpensier.

The blood bubbled from the wound, and suffering and agony were painted on the features of the wounded man.

"I am dying, I am dying," he murmured ; "Lord God have pity on me ! "

This last appeal to the divine pity, made by a man who probably had never thought of it until this supreme moment, touched Chicot.

"Let us be charitable," said he, "and since this man must die, let him at least die as gently as possible."

Approaching, with an effort he withdrew his sword from the wall, and, supporting Borromée's body, prevented it from falling to the floor.

This last precaution, however, was useless. Death had come quick and cold ; it had already paralyzed the members of the conquered man ; his limbs bent, he slipped from Chicot's arms, and rolled heavily to the floor.

This shock caused a wave of black blood to spurt from the wound, and with it fled the rest of the life which still animated Borromée.

Then Chicot opened the door and called Bonhomet.

He did not have to call twice.

The innkeeper had listened at the door, and had heard in succession the sound of the tables and stools, the clashing of the swords, and the fall of a heavy body.

But this worthy landlord had too much experience, especially after the confidence which had been placed in him, of the character of swordsmen in general, and of Chicot in particular, not to guess step by step what had taken place.

The only thing he did not know was which of the two adversaries had succumbed.

It must be said in praise of Maître Bonhomet that his face assumed an expression of veritable delight when he heard the voice of Chicot, and when he saw that it was the Gascon safe and sound who opened the door. Chicot, whom nothing escaped, noticed this expression and was inwardly pleased at it.

Bonhomet entered the little room, trembling.

"Ah ! good Jesus ! " he cried, seeing the body of the captain bathed in blood.

"Well! my God, yes, my poor Bonhomet," said Chicot; "this is how you find us; this dear captain is very ill, as you see."

"Oh! my good Monsieur Chicot, my good Monsieur Chicot!" exclaimed Bonhomet, ready to faint.

"Well, what?" asked Chicot.

"It was wrong of you to choose my inn for this deed! Such a fine-looking captain!"

"Would you prefer to have Chicot on the floor and Borromée standing?"

"No, oh, no!" cried the host from the depths of his heart.

"Well! that is what would have happened without a miracle from Providence."

"Really?"

"Faith of Chicot! Glance at my back a minute; it pains me, dear friend."

And he bent down in front of the innkeeper, so that his two shoulders were on a level with the eyes of the latter.

His doublet was torn between his shoulders, and a round spot of blood as large as a silver crown was reddening the edges of the hole.

"Blood!" exclaimed Bonhomet; "blood! Ah! you are wounded!"

"Wait, wait!"

And Chicot unfastened his doublet and then his shirt.

"Now look," said he.

"Ah! you had a cuirass! What luck, dear Monsieur Chicot; and you say the rogue tried to kill you?"

"Well! it seems to me that I could not have amused myself by thrusting a dagger between my own shoulders. Now what do you see?"

"A broken link."

"He went to work in earnest, this dear captain, — and blood?"

"Yes, a good deal of blood under the coat of mail."

"Let us take it off, then," said Chicot.

He removed it, and exposed a back which seemed made only of bones, muscles over the bones, and skin over the muscles.

"Ah, Monsieur Chicot!" cried Bonhomet; "it is as large as a plate."

"Yes, that is it; extravasated blood. There is ecchymosis, as the physicians say. Get me some white linen, pour an

equal quantity of good olive oil and wine dregs into a glass, and wash this spot, my friend, wash it."

"But this dead body, dear Monsieur Chicot, this body; what am I to do with it?"

"That does not concern you."

"What! that does not concern me?"

"No; give me some ink, pens, and paper."

"At once, dear Monsieur Chicot."

Bonhomet hurried from the room.

Meanwhile Chicot, who probably had no time to lose, heated in the lamp the point of a small knife, and cut the wax seal of the letter. After this, nothing further held the despatch, and Chicot drew it from its envelope and read it with a lively feeling of satisfaction.

As he finished, Maître Bonhomet returned with the oil, the wine, some paper, and pens.

Chicot placed the pen, ink, and paper before him, seated himself at the table, and stoically gave his back to Bonhomet.

Bonhomet understood the pantomime, and began his bathing.

But as if, instead of being irritated by a painful wound, he were being voluptuously tickled, Chicot, during this time, copied the letter from the Duc de Guise to his sister, and made his comments on each word. The letter was as follows:

"*Dear Sister: The expedition to Antwerp succeeded for every one else, but failed for us. You will be told that the Duc d'Anjou is dead; but do not believe this, for he lives.*

"*He lives, do you understand? Therein lies the whole point. There is an entire dynasty in these words; they separate the house of Lorraine from the throne of France more than the deepest abyss would do.*

"*But do not be too anxious on that score. I have discovered that two persons, whom I thought dead, are still living, and there is a great chance of death for the prince in the lives of these two persons.*

"*Think, therefore, only of Paris. In six weeks it will be time for the League to act. Let the Leaguers know that the time approaches, and that they must be ready.*

"*The army is on foot; we count on twelve thousand men, reliable and well equipped. I shall enter Flanders with them under the pretext of fighting the German Huguenots who are carrying aid to Henry of Navarre. I will defeat the Huguenots, enter France in a friendly way, and act as master.*"

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot.

"Am I hurting you, dear monsieur?" said Bonhomet, pausing in his rubbing.

"Yes, my good fellow."

"I will work more gently, I promise you."

Chicot continued:

"*P.S. I fully approve of your plan in regard to the Forty-Five. But permit me to say to you, dear sister, that you will do those fellows more honor than they deserve*" —

"Ah! the devil!" murmured Chicot; "this is becoming obscure."

And he re-read:

"*I fully approve of your plan in regard to the Forty-Five.*"

"What plan?" said Chicot to himself.

"*But permit me to say to you, dear sister, that you will do those fellows more honor than they deserve.*"

"What honor?"

Chicot resumed:

"*Than they deserve.*

"*Your affectionate brother,*

"*H. DE LORRAINE.*"

"Well," said Chicot, "everything is clear except the post-script. Good! We will watch that."

"Dear Monsieur Chicot," ventured Bonhomet, seeing that Chicot had stopped writing, if not thinking, "dear Monsieur Chicot, you have not told me what I am to do with this body."

"The affair is very simple."

"Yes, for you who are full of imagination, but for me?"

"Well! suppose, for instance, that this unfortunate captain had become engaged in a quarrel in the street with some Swiss or horse soldiers, and that he was brought to you wounded, would you have refused to receive him?"

"No, certainly not, unless you had forbidden me to do so, dear Monsieur Chicot."

"Suppose that, laid in this corner, he passed from life to death in spite of the care you gave him. It would be unfortunate, nothing more, would it not?"

"Certainly."

"And instead of incurring reproaches, you would deserve praise for your kindness. Suppose, moreover, that in dying,

this poor captain had uttered the well-known name of the Prior of the Jacobins, Saint Antoine."

"Dom Modeste Gorenflot?" cried Bonhomet, in astonishment.

"Yes, Dom Modeste Gorenflot. Well! you will inform Dom Modeste, who will hasten to you, and as the dead man's purse will be found in his pocket, — you understand? It is important for them to find the purse; I tell you this by way of advice, — and as the dead man's purse will be found in one of his pockets, and this letter in the other, there will be no suspicions."

"I understand, dear Monsieur Chicot."

"Furthermore, you will receive a reward instead of having to submit to a punishment."

"You are a great man, dear Monsieur Chicot; I will run to the Priory Saint Antoine."

"Wait a minute, the devil! I said the purse and the letter."

"Ah! yes, and you have the letter?"

"Yes."

"It must not be said that it has been read and copied?"

"By Heaven! It is precisely on account of the letter's being intact that you will receive a reward."

"There is a secret in this letter, then?"

"In these days there are secrets in everything, my dear Bonhomet."

And Chicot, after this sententious reply, put back the silk under the wax of the seal, in the same way as he had taken it off; then he joined the wax so skilfully that the most practised eye could not discover the least break in it.

After this he replaced the letter in the dead man's pocket, had the linen soaked in oil and wine dregs and applied to his wound like a poultice, put on the protecting coat of mail over his skin, his shirt over the coat, picked up his sword, wiped it off, returned it to its sheath, and went away.

Then he came back.

"After all," said he, "if the story I have invented does not seem good to you, you can accuse the captain of having put his own sword through his body."

"A suicide?"

"Yes; that would compromise no one, you understand."

"But they would not bury the poor fellow in consecrated ground."

"Poof!" said Chicot, "would that be any great pleasure for him?"

"Why, yes, I think so."

"In that case act as you would for yourself, my dear Bonhomet. Adieu!"

Then returning a second time:

"By the way," said he, "I will pay the bill, since he is dead."

And Chicot threw three crowns of gold upon the table.

After this he laid his finger on his lips in sign of silence and went away.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE HUSBAND AND THE LOVER.

It was not without deep emotion that Chicot again saw the Rue des Augustins, so calm and so deserted, the angle formed by the block of houses next to his, and finally his own dear house with its triangular roof, its worm-eaten balcony, and its gutters ornamented with waterspouts.

He had been so afraid of finding an empty space in place of his home, he had so feared to find the street blackened by the smoke of a fire, that street and dwelling seemed to him prodigies of neatness, grace, and splendor.

Chicot had hidden the key of his cherished house in a crevice of a stone which served as the base of one of the columns of this balcony. In those days a key of a box or an article of furniture was as heavy and as large as the most ponderous keys of our houses of to-day.

In those days the keys of houses were, following out natural proportions, equal to the keys of modern cities.

Chicot had done away with the difficulty of carrying his beloved key in his pocket, and had hidden it, as we have said.

He felt, therefore, it must be confessed, a slight shudder as he put his fingers into the stone; the shiver was followed by unparalleled joy as he felt the cold iron.

The key was actually in the place in which Chicot had left it.

It was the same with the furniture in the first room and the plank nailed to the beam; moreover, the thousand crowns still slept in their oak hiding-place.

Chicot was not avaricious. On the contrary, he had often thrown gold broadcast, sacrificing the material to the triumph of the idea, which is the philosophy of every man of a certain strength. But when the idea of the predominance of mind over matter had momentarily ceased, that is, when he needed neither money, nor sacrifice, when sensual thought took possession of Chicot's soul, and when this soul allowed the body to live and enjoy; then the first, constant, eternal source of animal pleasures resumed its value in the eyes of our philosopher, and no one knew better than himself into how many savory parcels that inestimable whole called a crown could be divided.

"*Ventre de biche!*" murmured Chicot, bending over the open flagstone in the centre of his room, the plank by his side and his treasure before him; "*ventre de biche!* I have a worthy neighbor in that young man who respected my money and caused others to respect it. Truly that was an act which is above price in these times. By Heavens! I owe this gallant man my thanks and this evening he shall have them."

Whereupon Chicot replaced the plank over the beam, the flag-stone over the plank, approached the window, and looked out.

The opposite house had still that gray, gloomy aspect which the imagination assumes as the natural color of houses of such a character.

"It cannot yet be bedtime," said Chicot, "and besides, those people are not great sleepers, I am sure. Let us see."

He descended to the street and, assuming his pleasantest expression, knocked at his neighbor's door.

He heard a noise on the stairway, then a footfall, yet he was kept waiting long enough to feel himself justified in knocking again.

This time the door opened and a man appeared in the darkness.

"Thanks and good evening," said Chicot, extending his hand, "I have just returned and I have come to thank you, my dear neighbor."

"Pardon me?" said a disappointed voice, the tone of which greatly surprised Chicot.

At the same time the man who had opened the door stepped back.

"Ah! I have made a mistake," said Chicot, "you were not my neighbor when I left home, and yet, God forgive me, I know you!"

"I know you, too," said the young man.

"You are Monsieur le Vicomte Ernauton de Carmainges?"

"And you are the Shade?"

"Yes," said Chicot, "I have fallen from the clouds."

"Well, what do you want, monsieur?" demanded the young man, somewhat sharply.

"Pardon me, perhaps I am troubling you, my dear monsieur?"

"No, but you will allow me to ask you, will you not, what I can do for you?"

"Nothing, except that I want to speak to the master of the house."

"Speak, then."

"How so?"

"I am the master of the house."

"You? and since when, I beg you?"

"Well! for three days."

"Ah! The house has been sold, then?"

"Apparently, since I have bought it."

"But the former owner?"

"Lives here no longer, as you see."

"Where is he?"

"I know nothing about him."

"Come, let us understand each other," said Chicot.

"I ask nothing better," replied Ernauton, with visible impatience; "only, let us make haste."

"The former owner was a man twenty-five or thirty years of age, who looked forty."

"No; he was a man sixty-five or sixty-six years old who looked his age."

"Bald?"

"No; on the contrary, he had a shock of white hair."

"There is an enormous scar on the left side of his head, is there not?"

"I did not see the scar, but he had a good many wrinkles."

"I cannot understand all this," said Chicot.

"Well," resumed Ernauton after an instant's silence, "what do you want with this man, my dear Monsieur Shade?"

Chicot was about to tell him what he wanted, but suddenly the mystery of Ernauton's surprise reminded him of a certain proverb dear to discreet men.

"I wanted to pay him a little visit, as is done among neighbors," said he, "that is all."

In this way Chicot neither lied nor admitted anything.

"My dear monsieur," said Ernauton, politely, but closing the door half way, "my dear monsieur, I am sorry, but I am unable to give you any more definite information."

"Thanks, monsieur," said Chicot, "I will ask somewhere else."

"But," continued Ernauton, closing the door still more, "that does not prevent my congratulating myself on the chance which has brought me into contact with you."

"You wish I were in hell, don't you?" murmured Chicot, returning the young man's bow.

In his preoccupation, and in spite of his mental reply, Chicot forgot to withdraw. Ernauton shut the door in his face, saying:

"Until next time, monsieur."

"A moment more, Monsieur de Carmainges," said Chicot.

"Monsieur, I am very sorry," replied Ernauton, "but I can delay no longer; I am waiting for some one who should be here now, and who would be angry with me if I did not use all discretion in receiving him."

"Say no more, monsieur, I understand," said Chicot. "Pardon me for having troubled you. I will retire."

"Adieu, dear Monsieur Shade."

"Adieu, worthy Monsieur Ernauton."

And Chicot stepped back and saw the door closed gently in his face.

He listened to find out if the mistrustful young man was watching for him to leave, but Ernauton went back up the stairs. Chicot returned without anxiety to his house, in which he shut himself up, resolved not to trouble his new neighbor further, but also not to lose sight of him.

Chicot was not the man to sleep on a fact which seemed to him of some importance without having studied, examined, and dissected the fact with the patience of a distinguished anatomist. In spite of himself, and this was either an advantage or a defect in his organism, every idea encrusted in his

brain presented itself with its salient points for analysis, so that the cerebral walls of poor Chicot were wounded and cracked by it, and begged for an immediate examination.

Until then, Chicot had been occupied with the sentence in the letter of the Duc de Guise: "I wholly approve of your plan in regard to the Forty-Five," but he now abandoned this study, which he promised himself he would resume later, to examine thoroughly the new line of preoccupation which had taken the place of the old. Chicot reflected that it was very strange to find Ernauton installed as master in the mysterious house, the inmates of which had so suddenly disappeared, especially as these former inmates reminded Chicot of a sentence in the letter from the Duc de Guise in regard to the Duc d'Anjou.

That was a chance worthy of notice, and Chicot had a habit of believing in providential chances.

When questioned on this point he even developed very ingenious theories.

The basis of these theories was an idea which in our opinion is well worth another. This was the idea:

Chance is God's reserve.

The All-Powerful allows himself reserve only under serious circumstances, especially as He sees that men are wise enough to study and foresee the chances afforded them by nature and the elements. Now God loves, or ought to love, to baffle the combinations of the proud, whom in the past he punished by drowning, and whom in the future he will punish by burning.

God, then, we say, or rather Chicot said, loves to baffle the combinations of the proud by means of elements unknown to them, the intervention of which they cannot foresee.

This theory, as one can readily see, contains specious arguments, and can furnish brilliant theses; but no doubt the reader is as anxious as was Chicot to know what Carmainges was doing in that house and will be glad if we pause in the development of theories.

Chicot thought it strange to find Ernauton in the house in which he had last seen Rémy. He thought it strange for two reasons: first, because of the absolute ignorance of each concerning the other, from which it might be supposed that there must have been an intermediary unknown to Chicot.

Second, because the house must have been sold to Ernauton, who had no money to buy it.

"It is true," said Chicot, settling himself as comfortably as possible in his gutter, his usual observatory; "it is true that the young man pretends that he is to have a visit, and that this visit is to be made by a woman. Nowadays women are rich and indulge in fancies. Ernauton is young, good-looking, and refined. Ernauton has pleased some one, and a meeting has been suggested; he has been told to buy this house; he has bought it, and agreed to the meeting.

"Ernauton," continued Chicot, "lives at court; so it must be some court lady with whom he is having an affair. Poor boy, will he love her? God forbid! He will fall into a gulf of perdition. Ah! am I not reading him a sermon? a sermon doubly useless and intensely stupid? Useless, because he does not hear it, and if he did hear it he would not listen to it. Stupid, because I would do better to go to bed and to think a little of poor Borromée. By the way," continued Chicot, becoming gloomy, "I perceive one thing, that remorse does not exist and is only relative. The fact is, I have no remorse at having killed Borromée, since the preoccupation which has seized me on account of the position of Monsieur de Carmainges makes me forget that I did kill Borromée. And, on the other hand, if he had nailed me to the table as I nailed him to the wall, he would certainly have no more remorse at this hour than I myself have."

Chicot had reached this point in his reasoning, in his study and his philosophy, which had taken a good hour and a half in all, when he was brought back to himself by the arrival of a litter, coming from the direction of *The Proud Chevalier*. The litter stopped before the mysterious house.

A veiled lady descended and disappeared within the door, which Ernauton held open.

"Poor boy!" murmured Chicot. "I was not mistaken; he was really waiting for a woman; and now I will go to sleep."

Thereupon Chicot rose, but stood motionless.

"I am wrong," said he; "I will not sleep; but I maintain what I said. If I do not sleep it is not remorse which prevents me, but curiosity, and what I say is so true, that if I remain in my observatory I shall think only of one thing, that is, which of the royal ladies honors this handsome Ernauton with her love. It will be better under the circumstances, for me to remain here, for if I go to bed I shall certainly get up and come back."

Thereupon he sat down again.

Almost an hour passed, without our being able to say whether Chicot thought of the unknown lady or Borromée, or whether he was torn by curiosity or stung by remorse, when he heard the gallop of a horse at the end of the street.

Before long a rider appeared, enveloped in a cloak. He stopped in the middle of the street, and seemed to be trying to get his bearings.

Then he perceived the litter and its attendants, and rode towards them. He was armed, for his sword clanked against his spurs.

The attendants attempted to prevent his passing; but he uttered a few words in a low voice, whereupon they not only withdrew respectfully, but one of them, as soon as he dismounted, held the bridle of his horse.

The stranger went to the door and knocked loudly.

"By Heaven!" said Chicot to himself; "I did well to remain! My presentiments told me something would happen, and they were not wrong. Here is the husband. Poor Ernauton! We are going to be present at some murder. However, if it is the husband, he is very good to announce his arrival by such loud knocking."

Notwithstanding the authoritative manner in which the stranger had knocked, those within seemed to hesitate about opening.

"Open the door," cried the man, who had knocked.

"Open, open!" repeated the attendants.

"Yes," said Chicot, "it is the husband; he evidently threatened to have the attendants whipped or hanged, and so they obey him. Poor Ernauton! he will be flayed alive! Oh, oh! if I allow it," added Chicot. "For," he resumed, "he helped me, and consequently, if this occurs, I ought to help him. Now it seems to me that the need will either occur or will not occur."

Chicot was determined and generous as well as curious. He unfastened his long sword, put it under his arm, and hastily descended his stairway. He knew how to open his door noiselessly, which is an indispensable gift to one who wishes to listen to advantage.

Chicot slipped under the balcony behind a pillar and waited.

Scarcely had he taken his position there before the door

opposite him opened at a word the stranger had whispered through the lock. But the latter remained on the threshold.

An instant later the lady came out and took the arm of the cavalier, who led her back to the litter, closed its doors, and remounted his horse.

"No further doubt," said Chicot, "it was the husband, a good sort of husband after all, since he did not look around the house a little to rip open my friend Carmainges."

The litter set out, the cavalier riding at the side.

"By Heaven!" said Chicot, "I must follow these people in order to know who they are and whither they are going. I shall certainly gain some solid facts for my friend De Carmainges."

Chicot followed the litter, taking care to keep in the shadow of the walls, while his footsteps were unnoticed in the noise made by the men and the horse.

Chicot's surprise was not small when he saw the litter stop in front of the inn of *The Proud Chevalier*.

Almost immediately, as if some one had been watching, the door opened.

The lady, still veiled, stepped down, entered, and ascended the tower, the window on the first floor of which was lighted. Her husband ascended behind her.

They were both respectfully preceded by Dame Fournichon, who carried a candle in her hand.

"Well," said Chicot, folding his arms, "it is beyond me!"

CHAPTER LXXXV.

HOW CHICOT BEGAN TO SEE CLEARLY THROUGH THE LETTER FROM MONSIEUR DE GUISE.

Chicot firmly believed that somewhere he had seen the figure of this complaisant cavalier. But his memory being somewhat confused from his trip to Navarre, where he had seen so many different faces, he could not remember as easily as usual.

While, hidden in shadow, his eyes fixed on the lighted window, he was wondering why this man and woman were holding a tête-à-tête in *The Proud Chevalier*, forgetting

Ernauton in the mysterious house, our worthy Gascon saw the door of the inn open and, in the ray of light which escaped, perceived the black silhouette of a little monk. The silhouette paused an instant to glance at the same window as Chicot was watching.

"Oh, oh!" he murmured, "that is a Jacobin's robe, it seems to me. Is Maître Gorenflot so lax in discipline that he allows his sheep to wander at such an hour of night and at such a distance from the priory?"

Chicot watched the monk while he walked along the Rue des Augustins, and a certain peculiar instinct told him that he would find in this monk the answer to the enigma which until then he had sought in vain.

Moreover, in the same way as Chicot had thought he recognized the figure of the cavalier, so he now thought he recognized the monk by a certain carrying of the shoulders, a certain military strut which belongs only to those accustomed to fencing-rooms and gymnasiums.

"I'll be damned!" he murmured, "if that gown does not hide the little miscreant whom they wanted to give me for a travelling companion, and who handles the musket and the foils so skilfully."

Scarcely had this idea came to Chicot before, in order to make sure of its value, he stretched out his long legs and in ten strides overtook the little brother, who, as he walked, held up his gown above his thin, nervous legs, in order to go the faster.

Moreover, it was not hard to overtake the little monk, as he stopped every now and then to glance behind him, as though it was with great difficulty and regret that he went away.

This look was constantly directed towards the lighted windows of the inn.

Chicot had not gone ten steps before he was certain that he was right in his conjectures.

"Hello, my little brother!" said he; "hello, my little Jacquot! Hello! my little Clement. Halt!"

He pronounced the last word in such a military tone that the little monk gave a start.

"Who calls me?" asked the young man, roughly, in a tone that was more warlike than gentle.

"I!" replied Chicot, drawing himself up before the Jacobin. "Do you recognize me, my son?"

"Oh! Monsieur Robert Briquet!" cried the little monk.

"In person, little one; and where are you going so late, dear child?"

"To the priory, Monsieur Briquet."

"But where are you coming from?"

"I?"

"Certainly, little libertine."

The young man shuddered.

"I do not know what you mean, Monsieur Briquet," he replied, "I was sent on an important mission by Dom Modeste, and he will vouch for me if need be."

"There! there! gently, my little Saint Jerome; we take fire like a match, apparently."

"Is there not cause when one hears things such as you tell me?"

"Well! you see, a gown like yours, coming from a tavern at such an hour"—

"From a tavern, I?"

"Why, yes! Is not the house you have just left *The Proud Chevalier?* Ah! you see that I have caught you!"

"You are right," said Clement, "I did come out of that house, but not out of an inn."

"What!" exclaimed Chicot; "the inn of *The Proud Chevalier* is not an inn?"

"An inn is a place where one drinks, and as I did not drink in that house, that house is not an inn for me."

"The devil! The distinction is subtle, and I am greatly mistaken or some day you will be a great theologian; but still, if you did not go into that house to drink, why did you go at all?"

Clement did not answer, and in spite of the darkness Chicot could read on his face a firm determination to say nothing further.

This resolution disturbed our friend greatly, for he had acquired the habit of finding out everything.

It was not that Clement showed any sharpness in his silence; on the contrary, he had seemed charmed to meet his learned professor, Maître Robert Briquet, so unexpectedly, and had received him with all the enthusiasm that could be expected from his cold, reserved nature.

The conversation dropped completely. In order to renew it, Chicot was on the point of uttering the name of Brother

Borromée, but although he felt no remorse, or thought he felt none, the name died on his lips.

The young man stood silent, apparently waiting for something; one would have said he thought it a happiness to remain as long as possible in the vicinity of the inn of *The Proud Chevalier*.

Robert Briquet strove to speak to him of the trip which they had for an instant hoped to make together. The eyes of Jacques Clement shone at the words "space" and "liberty."

Robert Briquet said that in the countries through which he had just travelled fencing was held in high esteem. He added carelessly that he had even brought back some marvellous thrusts.

This put Jacques on his mettle. He asked what the thrusts were, and Chicot, with his long arm, indicated some of them on the arm of the little brother.

But all these attempts on the part of Chicot did not soften the heart of little Clement, and while trying to parry the unknown blows which his friend Maître Robert Briquet was showing him, he preserved an obstinate silence in regard to what had taken place in the quarter.

Vexed, but still master of himself, Chicot resolved to try injustice. Injustice is one of the most powerful provocations invented to make women, children, and inferiors speak, of whatever nature they may be.

"Never mind, little one," said he, as if returning to his first thought, "never mind, you are a charming little monk; but you go to inns, and such inns too! in which there are beautiful ladies and you pause in ecstasy before the window through which their shadow can be seen. Little one, little one, I shall tell this to Don Modeste."

The blow struck home more directly than Chicot had supposed, for when he began he did not suspect that the wound was so deep.

Jacques turned round like a trodden serpent.

"That is not true!" he exclaimed, crimson with shame and anger. "I do not look at women!"

"Yes, you do," continued Chicot; "and there was a very beautiful lady at *The Proud Chevalier* when you came out, and you turned round to see her again. I know that you were waiting for her in the tower, and I know that you spoke to her."

Chicot was proceeding by induction.

Jacques could not contain himself.

"Of course I spoke to her!" he cried. "Is it a sin to speak to women?"

"No, when we do not speak to them from any impulse of our own, or because we yield to the temptation of Satan."

"Satan has nothing to do with this. I had to speak to this lady because I had a letter to give her."

"From Dom Modeste?" cried Chicot.

"Yes, now go and complain to him!"

For an instant Chicot was puzzled, and began groping in the shade of his thoughts. Then at the last words, he felt a beam of light flash through the darkness of his brain.

"Ah!" said he, "I know about it."

"What do you know?"

"What you are not willing to tell me."

"I do not tell my own secrets, much less those of others."

"Yes, but to me."

"Why to you?"

"I am a friend of Dom Modeste, and then I"—

"Well?"

"I know beforehand all that you can tell me."

The little Jacques looked at Chicot and shook his head with a smile of incredulity.

"Well!" said Chicot; "shall I tell you what you will not tell me?"

"I wish you would," said Jacques.

Chicot made an effort.

"In the first place," said he, "poor Borromée"—

The face of Jacques clouded.

"Oh!" said the youth, "had I been there"—

"Had you been there?"

"The thing would not have happened."

"You would have defended him against the Swiss with whom he quarrelled?"

"I would have defended him against the whole world!"

"So that he would not have been killed?"

"Or so that I might have been killed with him."

"In short, you were not there, so that the poor devil died in a wretched inn, and in dying, uttered the name of Modeste."

"Yes."

"And Dom Modeste was informed?"

"A terrified man brought the news to the convent."

"And Dom Modeste sent for his litter and hastened to the *Corne d'Abondance.*"

"How do you know that?"

"Oh! you do not know me, little one. I am something of a sorcerer."

Jacques stepped back.

"That is not all," continued Chicot, who, as he talked, was beginning to see more clearly from the light of his own words. "A letter was found in the dead man's pocket?"

"Yes."

"And Dom Modeste ordered his little Jacques to take this letter to its destination?"

"Yes."

"And little Jacques ran at once to the Hôtel de Guise."

"Oh!"

"Where he found no one."

"Great God!"

"Except Monsieur de Mayneville."

"Mercy!"

"And Monsieur de Mayneville led Jacques to the inn of *The Proud Chevalier.*"

"Monsieur Briquet, Monsieur Briquet," cried Jacques, "if you know this" —

"Well, *ventre de biche!* you see very well that I know it," said Chicot, happy at having freed this enigma, so important to him, from the shadowy swaddling-bands in which it was at first wrapped.

"In that case," said Jacques, "you see well enough, Monsieur Briquet, that I am not guilty!"

"No," said Chicot, "you are guilty neither of a sin of commission nor of omission, but you are guilty in thought."

"I?"

"Yes, you think the duchess very beautiful."

"I?"

"And you went back to look at her again through the windows."

"I?"

The little monk blushed and stammered.

"That is true; she resembles a Virgin Mary which hung over my mother's bed."

"Oh!" murmured Chicot, "how many things are lost by people who are not curious."

Then he made the little Clement, whom he now held in his power, tell him everything that he himself had just told; but this time with the details he could not know.

"You see," said Chicot, when he had finished, "what a poor fencing-master you had in Brother Borromée!"

"Monsieur Briquet," said little Jacques, "we must not speak ill of the dead."

"No, but acknowledge one thing."

"What?"

"That Borromée did not fight as well as the one who killed him."

"That is true."

"And now, that is all I had to say to you. Good-night, my little Jacques. We shall meet again, and if you wish" —

"What, Monsieur Briquet?"

"Well, I will give you fencing-lessons."

"Oh! gladly."

"No, go back, little one, for they will be waiting for you impatiently at the priory."

"That is true; thanks, Monsieur Briquet, for having reminded me."

And the monk hastened away.

It was not without reason that Chicot dismissed the lad. He had drawn from him all that he wanted to know, and yet, on the other hand, there still remained something for him to learn. Therefore, with long strides, he returned to his house. The litter, the attendants, and the horse were still before the door of *The Proud Chevalier*. He went noiselessly back to his gutter. The house opposite his was still lighted.

From that moment he had eyes only for that house. In the first place, through a rent in the curtain he saw Ernauton pass back and forth, apparently waiting impatiently for some one.

Then he saw the litter and Mayneville return, and finally he saw the duchess enter the room in which Ernauton was palpitating rather than breathing.

Ernauton knelt down before the duchess, who gave him her white hand to kiss, and bade the young man rise, and sit down opposite her before an elegantly appointed table.

"That is strange," said Chicot; "this began like a conspiracy, and ends like a rendezvous of love! Yes," went on

Chicot, "but who arranged this meeting? Madame de Montpensier?"

Then a new idea flashed across his mind.

"Oh, oh!" he murmured.

"Dear Sister: I approve of your plan in regard to the Forty-Five; but permit me to say that you are doing those fellows great honor."

"*Ventre de biche!*" exclaimed Chicot; "I return to my first idea; it is not love, but a conspiracy. Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier loves Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges; therefore, let us watch the love of Madame la Duchesse."

And Chicot watched until half-past twelve, when Ernauton fled, his cloak over his nose, and Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier returned to her litter.

"Now," said Chicot, descending his stairs, "what is this chance of death which is to deliver the Duc de Guise from the heir presumptive to the crown? Who are the people thought to be dead, but who are still living. By Heaven! I may well be on their traces!"

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE CARDINAL DE JOYEUSE.

Youth has its obstinate tendencies in evil and good which equal the steadier resolution of riper years.

Directed towards good, this obstinacy produces great actions and inspires the man just starting out in life with an impulse which naturally leads him towards some act of heroism.

Thus from having been the most peevish and intractable children ever seen, Bayard and Duguesclin became great captains; thus the swineherd whom Nature made herdsman of Montalte, and whose genius made Sixtus Quintus, became a great pope from having obstinately done his duty poorly as swineherd. So, the worst Spartan natures developed in the direction of heroism, having begun by persisting in dissimulation and cruelty.

We have here but to trace the portrait of an ordinary man; and yet more than one biographer would have found in Henry du Bouchage, at twenty years of age, the material for a great man. Henry persisted in his love and his withdrawal from

the world. As his brother had asked him to do, and as the King had demanded, he remained several days alone with his one thought; then, his determination having become more and more fixed, he decided one morning to pay a visit to his brother the cardinal, a man of importance who, although only twenty-six years of age, had already been cardinal for two years, and who from the archbishopric of Narbonne had risen to the highest plane of ecclesiastical greatness, thanks to the nobility of his family and the strength of his mind.

François de Joyeuse, whom we have already introduced upon the scene in order to throw light upon the doubt of Henry de Valois in regard to Sylla, was young, worldly, beautiful, and spiritual, and one of the most remarkable men of that epoch.

Ambitious by nature, but circumspect by calculation and position, François de Joyeuse might have taken for a motto "*Nothing is too much*," and could have proved it. He alone, perhaps, of all the courtiers, and François de Joyeuse was before all else a courtier, had known how to turn to his aid the two religious and lay thrones, under the jurisdiction of which he lived, as a French gentleman and a prince of the church. Sextus protected him against Henry III., Henry III. against Sextus. He was an Italian in Paris, a Parisian in Rome, magnificent and tactful everywhere. The sword of the grand admiral added weight to François; but it was noticed from certain smiles of the cardinal that if he failed in the mighty temporal weapons which, elegant as he was, were handled so well by his brother, he knew how to use and even abuse the spiritual arms confided to him by the sovereign head of the church. Cardinal François de Joyeuse had quickly grown wealthy, rich in his own patrimony at first, afterwards from his different benefices. In those days the church was largely endowed, and when its funds were exhausted it knew the sources, to-day dried up, from which to renew them.

François de Joyeuse carried on a large establishment. Leaving to his brother the military pride of the house, he filled his antechambers with curates, bishops, and archbishops. He had his specialty. Once cardinal, as he was prince of the church, and consequently superior to his brother, he had engaged pages in the Italian fashion, and guards in the French fashion But these guards and pages were only a greater means of liberty for him. Often he ranged them around a great litter, through the curtains of which the gloved hand of his secretary

was thrust out, while he himself, on his horse, his sword at his side, rode about the city disguised in a wig, an enormous ruff, and riding-boots, the noise of which rejoiced his soul.

Thus the cardinal enjoyed a very great consideration, for at certain elevations human fortunes are absorbing, and, as if they were composed of nothing but adhesive atoms, force all other fortunes to follow them as satellites, and for this reason the glorious name of his father, and the recent and unexpected glory of his brother Anne, threw all their brilliancy on him. Besides, as he had scrupulously followed the precept of hiding his life and scattering abroad his intellect, he was known only by his best side, and even in his family was looked on as a very great man, a happiness not known by many emperors covered with glory and crowned by a whole nation.

It was this prelate that the Count du Bouchage sought after the explanation with his brother, and his conversation with the King of France. But as we have said, he let several days elapse in order to obey the injunction of his elder brother and his King.

François occupied a beautiful house in the Cité. Its immense court was never free from horsemen and litters. But the prelate, whose garden bordered on the river bank, frequently left his gardens and his antechambers with their courtiers, and as there was a door opening on the bank, and near the bank a boat which conveyed him gently and noiselessly as far as he wished, it often happened that they waited in vain for the prelate, whom some grave indisposition or severe penance served as a pretext for not receiving them. This was still a touch of Italy in the heart of the good city of the King of France, it was Venice between the arms of the Seine.

François was proud, but in no way vain; he loved his friends like brothers, and his brothers almost as much as his friends. Five years older than Du Bouchage, he spared him neither good nor bad advice, neither his purse nor his smile.

But as the dress of a cardinal was very becoming to him, Du Bouchage thought him handsome, noble, and almost startling, so that he respected him perhaps more than he respected the eldest brother. Under his beautiful cuirass and his military lace, Henry tremblingly confided his love to Anne, but scarcely dared confess himself to François.

However, as he set out to the cardinal's hôtel, his mind was made up. He frankly met the confessor first, then the friend.

He entered the court, which several gentlemen were just leaving, wearied at having solicited the favor of an audience in vain. He crossed the antechambers, the halls, then the apartments. They told him, as they had told the others, that his brother was holding a conference; but it never occurred to any of the servants to close a door before Du Bouchage.

Du Bouchage therefore passed through the rooms and came to the garden, the real garden of a Roman prelate, with shade, freshness, and perfumes, as are found to-day in the Villa Pamphile or the Borghese Palace. Henry stopped beneath a clump of trees. Just then the gate leading from the river bank creaked on its hinges, and a man entered wrapped in a great brown cloak, and followed by a sort of page.

This man perceived Henry, who was too absorbed in his meditation to think of him, and glided among the trees to avoid being seen either by Du Bouchage or any one else.

Henry paid no attention to this mysterious entrance. It was only on turning that he saw a man going into the house.

After waiting ten minutes, he was about to enter and ask a valet at exactly what hour his brother could be seen, when a servant who apparently was looking for him, saw him, came to him, and begged him to come into the library, where the cardinal awaited him.

At this invitation Henry walked slowly back. He expected a fresh struggle; he found his brother the cardinal, on whom a valet was putting a prelate's gown, somewhat worldly, perhaps, but elegant and above all comfortable.

"Good morning," said the cardinal; "what news, brother?"

"Excellent news so far as our family is concerned," said Henry; "Anne, you know, has covered himself with glory in the retreat from Antwerp, and he is alive."

"And, thank God! you too are safe and sound, Henry."

"Yes, brother."

"You see," said the cardinal, "that God has his plans concerning us."

"Brother, I am so grateful to God that I have decided to consecrate myself to his service. I have come to speak to you seriously about this plan which seems to me to be matured, and about which I have already told you something."

"Are you still thinking of that, Du Bouchage?" said the cardinal, giving vent to a slight exclamation which showed that Joyeuse would have to struggle.

"Still, brother."

"But it is impossible, Henry," replied the cardinal. "Have you not already been told so?"

"I have not listened to what I have been told, brother, because a stronger voice within me prevents my listening to any word which might turn me from God."

"You are not so ignorant of the affairs of the world, brother," said the cardinal, seriously, "as to believe that this voice is really that of the Lord. On the contrary, I tell you, it is a wholly worldly voice that speaks to you. God has nothing to do with this, so do not abuse His holy name, and, above all, do not mistake the voice of earth for that of Heaven."

"I do not confound them, brother; I simply mean that something irresistibly draws me towards retreat and solitude."

"Very good, Henry; now we will come to the point. My dear boy, this is what you must do. I am going to take you at your word, and make you the happiest of men."

"Thanks, oh! thanks, brother."

"Listen to me, Henry. You must take some money, two attendants, and travel through Europe, as is fitting for a son of our house. You will see distant lands, Tartary, Russia, the Laplanders, those fabulous people whom the sun never visits; you will be buried in your thoughts until the consuming germ in you will be killed or warped. Then you will return."

Henry, who had sat down, rose, more serious than his brother had been.

"You do not understand me, monseigneur," said he.

"Pardon me, Henry, you said retreat and solitude."

"Yes, I said that; but by retreat and solitude I meant the cloister, brother, not a journey. To travel is to enjoy life, while I almost wish to suffer death, or if not to suffer it, at least to taste it."

"Permit me to tell you, Henry, that this is an absurd idea, for whoever wishes to isolate himself can be alone anywhere. Now, let it be the cloister. Well! I understand that you have come to me to discuss this plan. I know some very learned Benedictines and some very ingenious Augustins, whose houses are gay, flowery, easy, and comfortable. In the midst of works on science and art you will spend a delightful year in good company, which is important, for one should not grow rusty in this world, and if at the end of a year you persist in your project, well! my dear Henry, I will make no further

opposition, but will myself open the door which will lead you gently to eternal safety."

"You do not exactly understand me, brother," replied Du Bouchage, shaking his head, "or rather your generous intelligence does not wish to understand me; it is not a gay sojourn, a pleasant retreat, that I wish, but the severe cloister, black and dead. I wish to take vows, vows which for all distraction will leave me only a tomb to dig, and a long prayer to make."

The cardinal frowned and rose.

"Yes," said he, "I understood perfectly, but I was trying by my resistance, without set phrases or logic, to combat the folly of your resolutions, but you force me to them. Listen."

"Ah! brother," said Henry, dejectedly, "do not try to convince me, it is impossible."

"Brother, I will speak to you first in the name of God, of the God you offend by saying that this wild idea comes from him. God does not accept hasty sacrifices. You are weak, since you give in to your first grief. How could God be pleased with the almost unworthy victim you offer him?"

Henry made a gesture.

"Oh! I shall spare you no longer, brother, for you spare no one," went on the cardinal; "you forget the grief you are causing your brother and myself."

"Pardon me," interrupted Henry, flushing red, "pardon me, monseigneur; is the service of God so gloomy and dishonorable a career that a whole family should go into mourning? You, brother, you, whose portrait I see in this room, with this gold, these diamonds, this purple, are you not the honor and the joy of our house, although you have chosen the service of God as my elder brother has chosen that of the kings of the earth?"

"Child! child!" exclaimed the cardinal, impatiently, "you will make me believe you have lost your head. What! you compare my house to a cloister, my hundred valets, my outriders, my gentlemen, and my guards to the cell and the broom which are the only weapons and the only wealth of the cloister? Are you mad? Did you not say just now that you set aside these superfluities which are my necessity, pictures, precious vases, pomp, and noise? Have you, like me, the desire and the hope of placing on your brow the crown of Saint Peter? That is a career, Henry; one strives for it, struggles for it, lives for it. But you! you! It is the sap of the miner, it is the spade of the trapper, the tomb of the grave-

digger, that you want. No more air, no more pleasure, no more hope! And all, — I blush for you who are a man, — all because you love a woman who does no love you! Truly, Henry, you are doing an injury to your race!"

"Brother," cried the young man, pale, his eyes shining with a dull fire, "would you prefer me to blow my brains out, or take advantage of the honor I have in carrying a sword to run it through my heart? By Heaven, monseigneur, you are cardinal and prince; give me absolution from this mortal sin, and the thing will be done so quickly that you will not have had the time to finish this ugly and unworthy thought about my dishonoring my race, which, thanks to God, a Joyeuse will never do."

"Come, come, Henry!" said the cardinal, drawing his brother to him, and pressing him in his arms; "come, dear child, beloved by all, forget, and be kind to those who love you. I beg you for myself to listen. We are all happy, which is a rare thing on this earth, some from satisfied ambition, others from all kinds of blessings which God has showered on us. Do not, therefore, I beg you, Henry, hurl the fatal poison of retreat at the head of your family. Think how our father would weep; think how all of us would wear on our brows the black stain of the sorrow you bring on us! I tell you, Henry, to let yourself unbend. The cloister will be of no use to you. I will not say that you will die there, for you would answer me, wretched one, by a too intelligent smile. Alas! no, I will tell you that the cloister is more fatal than the tomb; the tomb kills only life, but the cloister kills intellect; the cloister bows the head instead of lifting it to heaven. Little by little the dampness of the vaults passes into the blood and filters into the bones, to make of the monk one more granite statue for the monastery. Brother, brother, take care; we have only a few years, only one period of youth. Well, the limit of happy youth will pass, for you are under the sway of a great grief. But at thirty you will be a man; the vigor of maturity will come; it will draw with it the remains of worn-out sorrow, and then you will want to live again, but it will be too late, for you will be sad, ugly, and miserable; your heart will no longer know love, your eye will no longer sparkle; those you seek will flee from you as from a whitened sepulchre, the black depths of which are feared by every eye. Henry, I speak to you in friendship and wisdom; listen to me."

The young man stood motionless and silent. The cardinal hoped that he had touched him and shaken his resolution.

"Wait," said he, "try another resource, Henry; this poisoned dart you wear in your heart, carry it everywhere, into the midst of noise, at fêtes, sit with it at our feasts; imitate the wounded doe, which jumps the copse, the thicket, and the bramble bushes, striving to remove from its side the arrow held there by the lips of the wound. Sometimes the arrow falls."

"For pity's sake, brother," said Henry, "do not insist further. What I ask of you is not a passing fancy, not the decision of an hour, it is the result of a slow and painful resolution. Brother, in the name of Heaven I adjure you to grant me the favor I beg of you!"

"Well! what favor do you ask, let us see?"

"A dispensation, monseigneur."

"For what purpose?"

"To shorten my novitiate."

"Ah! I knew it, Du Bouchage, you are worldly even in your austerity, poor friend. Oh! I know the reason you are going to give me. Yes, yes, you are indeed worldly; you resemble those young men who became volunteers, and who are anxious for bullets, shots, but not the work of the trenches and the sweeping of the tents. There is resource in that, Henry; so much the better! so much the better!"

"This dispensation, brother, this dispensation. I beg you for it on my knees."

"I promise it to you. I will write to Rome; but in exchange, promise me one thing."

"What?"

"That during the delay of this month you will refuse none of the pleasures offered you. And if in a month you still persist in your idea, Henry, well, I will give you the dispensation with my own hand. Are you satisfied now, and have you anything else to ask?"

"No, brother, thanks; but a month is so long and delay will kill me!"

"In the meantime, and as a beginning to your distractions, will you breakfast with me? I have good company this morning."

The prelate smiled in a way that the most worldly favorites of Henry III. would have envied.

"Brother"— said Du Bouchage, beginning to excuse himself.

"I will accept no excuse. I am the only one of your family here, since you have just returned from Flanders, and your house cannot yet be ready."

At these words the cardinal rose, and drawing aside a curtain which shut off a large room sumptuously furnished:

"Come, countess," said he, "let us persuade Monsieur le Comte du Bouchage to remain with us."

As the cardinal raised the curtain, Henry saw, half reclining on the cushions, the page who had returned with the gentleman through the gate opening on the river bank, and even before the prelate announced her sex, Henry recognized her as a woman.

Something like a sudden terror, an invincible fear, seized him, and while the worldly cardinal went to take the handsome page by the hand, Henry du Bouchage rushed from the apartment, so that when François brought in the lady smiling in the hope of winning back a heart to the world, the room was completely vacant.

François frowned, and seating himself before a table covered with papers and letters, he hastily wrote a few lines.

"Be kind enough to ring, dear countess," said he, "the bell is under your hand."

The page obeyed.

A trusted valet appeared.

"Let a courier mount instantly," said François, "and take this letter to Monsieur le Grand Admiral, at Château Thierry."

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

NEWS FROM AURILLY.

The following day the King was working in the Louvre with his superintendent of finances when he was informed that Monsieur de Joyeuse the elder had just arrived, and was waiting for him in the large audience hall, having come from Château Thierry with a message from Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou.

The King left his work hastily and went to meet this dear friend.

A large number of officers and courtiers filled the room ; the queen mother had arrived that evening, escorted by her maids of honor, and these lively ladies were always surrounded by satellites.

The King gave his hand to Joyeuse, and threw a glance of satisfaction over the assembly.

In a corner of the doorway, in his usual place, stood Henry du Bouchage, rigorously doing his service and his duty.

The King thanked him, and gave a friendly nod, to which Henry replied by a low bow.

This made Joyeuse turn his head and smile from afar on his brother ; but he did not bow too perceptibly for fear of violating etiquette.

" Sire," said Joyeuse, " I am sent to your Majesty by Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou, recently returned from the expedition to Flanders."

" Is my brother well, admiral ? " asked the King.

" As well, sire, as the state of his mind permits ; but I will not hide from your Majesty that monseigneur seems to be suffering."

" He will need amusements after his misfortunes," said the King, happy to announce the defeat which had come to his brother while apparently sympathizing with him.

" I think so, sire."

" We have been told, admiral, that the disaster was cruel."

" Sire " —

" But that, thanks to you, a large part of the army was saved. Thanks, admiral, thanks. Does not this poor Monsieur d'Anjou wish to see us ? "

" Ardently, sire."

" Well, we will see him. Are you not of this opinion, madame ? " said Henry, turning to Catharine, whose heart was undergoing all the suffering that her face persisted in hiding.

" Sire," she replied, " I should have gone to my son by myself ; but since your Majesty deigns to join with me in his pledge of good friendship, the journey will be a pleasure trip."

" You will come with us, gentlemen," said the King to the courtiers. " We will leave to-morrow ; I shall sleep at Meaux."

" Sire, shall I go and announce this good news to monseigneur ? "

" No, no ! Leave me so soon, admiral ? no ! I understand that a Joyeuse should be loved by my brother and wanted by him,

but we have two of you, thank God! Du Bouchage, you will start for Château Thierry, if you please."

"Sire," said Henry, "may I be permitted after announcing the arrival of your Majesty to Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou to return to Paris?"

"You will do as you please, Du Bouchage," said the King.

Henry bowed and went towards the door. Fortunately Joyeuse was watching him.

"Will you allow me to say a word to my brother, sire?" he asked.

"Certainly. But what is the matter?" asked the King, in a low tone.

"He will burn the pavement to execute the commission, and burn it to return, which will upset my plans, sire, as well as those of Monsieur le Cardinal."

"Go then, and reprimand this mad lover for me."

Anne hastened after his brother and joined him in the antechamber.

"Well!" said Joyeuse, "you are leaving in great haste, Henry."

"Why, yes, brother."

"Because you want to return quickly?"

"Yes."

"Then you do not intend remaining a short time at Château Thierry?"

"The shortest time possible."

"Why?"

"Where there is pleasure going on, brother, is not the place for me."

"On the contrary, Henry, it is just because Monseigneur le Duc de Anjou is to give fêtes at court that you ought to remain at Château Thierry."

"It would be impossible for me to do so, brother."

"Because of your desire for retirement, of your plans for severity?"

"Yes, brother."

"You went to the King to ask for a dispensation?"

"Who told you that?"

"I know it."

"It is true, I went to him."

"You will not obtain it."

"Why not, brother?"

"Because the King would have no interest in depriving himself of such a servant as you."

"In that case my brother the cardinal will do that which his Majesty is unwilling to do."

"All this for a woman!"

"Anne, I beg you not to insist any further."

"Oh! do not worry, I shall not begin again; but for once let us come to the point. You leave for Château Thierry. Well! instead of returning as quickly as you wish, I desire you to wait for me in my apartment. It is a long time since we have been together and I need to be with you, you see."

"Brother, you go to Château Thierry for pleasure. If I stay there I shall poison all your good times."

"Oh, not at all! I can resist and I have a fortunate temperament, perfectly fitted to drive away your melancholia."

"Brother"—

"Count," said the admiral, with imperious insistence, "permit me; in this I represent our father, and I charge you to wait for me at Château Thierry. You will find my apartments there, and they will be yours. They open from the ground floor upon the park."

"If you command, brother," said Henry, with resignation.

"Call it by any name you please, count, wish or command, but wait for me."

"I will do so, brother."

"And I am sure you will not be angry with me," added Joyeuse, pressing the young man to him.

The latter slipped away, somewhat bitterly, perhaps, from his brother's embrace, ordered his horse, and left at once for Château Thierry.

He rode with the anger of a tried man, that is, he devoured space.

That very evening before nightfall he climbed the hill on which Château Thierry was built, with the Marne river at its feet.

At his name, the gates of the château in which the prince lived were opened, but as to an audience, it took more than an hour to obtain one. The prince, some said, was in his apartments; another said he was sleeping. He was composing music, the valet supposed.

But not one of the servants could give a positive answer. Henry insisted in order that he might have nothing further to

think about in regard to the service of the King, and that he might then give himself up wholly to his sadness. At this insistence and as he and his brother were known to be among the most intimate friends of the duke, he was allowed to enter one of the rooms on the first floor, in which the prince at last consented to receive him. A half hour sped by, and night was beginning to fall gently.

The lagging, heavy step of the Duc d'Anjou resounded in the passage. Henry, who recognized it, prepared himself for the customary ceremonial. But the prince, who seemed greatly hurried, quickly dispensed with the formalities of this ambassador by taking him by the hand and embracing him.

"Good day, count," said he. "Why have you inconvenienced yourself to come and see a poor vanquished man?"

"The King sends me, monseigneur, to inform you that he is very anxious to see your highness, and that in order to let you recover from your weariness, his Majesty will visit you in Château Thierry to-morrow, at the latest."

"The King is coming to-morrow!" cried Francis, in a tone of impatience.

Then he added quickly:

"To-morrow! To-morrow! Why really, nothing will be ready either in the château or in the town to receive his Majesty."

Henry bowed like a man who delivers an order, but who has not been commanded to comment on it.

"The great desire of their majesties to see your highness soon prevented their thinking of the inconvenience."

"Well! well!" said the prince, volubly, "it is for me to make the most of the time. I will leave you then, Henry. Thanks for your speed, for you have ridden fast, I see. You must rest now."

"Has your highness no further orders for me?" asked Henry, respectfully.

"Not one. Go and sleep. Dinner will be served in your own rooms, count. I shall not eat this evening; I am in pain, and restless. I have lost my appetite and sleep, which makes my life gloomy, and which you understand I cannot ask any one to share. By the way, you know the news?"

"No, monseigneur; what news?"

"Aurilly has been devoured by wolves."

"Aurilly?" cried Henry, surprised.

"Yes! yes! — devoured! It is strange that all who are near to me die some terrible death. Good-evening, count, sleep well."

And the prince went rapidly away.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

DOUBT.

Henry descended, and as he passed through the antechambers he found a number of officers of his acquaintance who hastened to him, and with a show of affection offered to conduct him to the apartments of his brother, situated in one of the corners of the château.

The duke had given Joyeuse the library to use during his stay at Château Thierry.

Two rooms, furnished in the style of Francis I., opened into each other, and adjoined the library. The latter room looked out on the gardens.

A bed had been prepared in the library for Joyeuse, who had at once idle and cultivated tastes.

By stretching out his hand, he could touch science; by opening the windows he could drink in nature.

Superior organisms need more complete enjoyments, and the morning breeze, the song of the birds, and the perfume of the flowers gave a new charm to the verses of Clément Marot or to the odes of Ronsard.

Henry decided that he would keep everything as it was, not that he was devoid of the poetic sybaritism of his brother, but from a feeling of indifference, and because he did not care whether he was there or elsewhere.

But as the count, no matter in what condition of mind, had been brought up never to neglect his duties to the king or the princes of the house of France, he inquired with the greatest care at the château which had been inhabited by the prince since his return.

This time, chance sent Henry an excellent guide. It was the young ensign whose indiscretion in the little village of Flanders, where our characters made a temporary halt, had betrayed the count's secret to the prince.

The ensign had not left the prince since the latter's return, and could inform Henry perfectly. On arriving at the Château Thierry, the prince had first sought dissipation and noise.

He occupied the state apartments, received morning and night, and during the day hunted the stag in the forest or rode about the park. Since the news of the death of Aurilly, however, which had come to the prince no one knew how, the latter had retired to a pavilion in the midst of the park. This pavilion, a sort of inaccessible retreat except to those well acquainted with the prince, was hidden under the foliage of trees, and could scarcely be seen behind the gigantic elms and through the thick hedges.

It was to this pavilion that the prince had retired two days before. Those who did not know him said that grief caused by the death of Aurilly had plunged him into this solitude. Those who knew him claimed that he was carrying out some shameful or infernal scheme which time would bring to light. Either of these suppositions seemed probable, as the prince was in despair if a visit or a matter of business called him to the château; and as soon as the visit or the business was concluded he returned to his solitude, attended merely by two aged valets who had been with him since he was born.

"If the prince is in this humor," said Henry, "the fêtes will not be gay."

"Assuredly," replied the ensign, "for every one will want to sympathize with the grief of the prince so wounded in his pride and affection."

Henry continued to question, and in spite of himself took a strange interest in everything.

The death of Aurilly, whom he had known at court and whom he had seen in Flanders, the indifference with which the prince had announced his loss to him, the retreat in which the living prince was said to have lived since, — all was attached in his mind, without his knowing how, to the mysterious and sombre web woven by the events of his life.

"They do not know," said he to the ensign, "where the prince heard the news of Aurilly's death?"

"No."

"But," he insisted, "is not something said about it?"

"Oh, no doubt," replied the ensign; "you know, something is always said, whether it is true or false."

"Well! let us hear."

"They say that the prince was hunting under the willows near the river, and that he was apart from the other hunters, for he does everything by fits and starts, and is carried away by hunting in the same way as he is by cards, by battle, and by grief, when suddenly they saw him riding back with a look of consternation on his face. The courtiers questioned him, thinking that it was merely something connected with the hunt. He held in his hand two rolls of gold.

"'Can you understand this, gentlemen?' said he, in a broken voice, 'Aurilly is dead, Aurilly has been devoured by wolves!'

"Every one cried out.

"'Yes,' said the prince, 'it is true, or the devil take me.'

"The poor lute-player was always a better musician than rider. It seems that his horse ran away with him, and that he fell into a quagmire, where he was killed. The following day two travellers passed by this bog, and found a body partially devoured by the wolves. The proof that this happened and that robbers had nothing to do with it is that he had these two rolls of gold with him and that they were carefully brought to the prince.

"Now, as no one was seen bringing these rolls of gold," continued the ensign, "it is supposed they were given to the prince by the two travellers, who met and recognized him on the bank of the river and announced the death of Aurilly."

"It is strange," murmured Henry.

"Much more so," continued the ensign, "because they say — is this true, or an invention? — that the prince opened the small gate of the park by the chestnut trees and admitted two persons, probably the two travellers, into the park. It was after this that the prince moved to his pavilion, and we have not seen him since, except by stealth."

"And no one has seen the two travellers?" asked Henry.

"As I went to ask the prince for the night watchword for the guard of the château," said the ensign, "I met a man who seemed a stranger in the household of his highness, but I could not see his face, as he turned away at sight of me and drew the hood of his coat over his eyes."

"The hood of his coat?"

"Yes, the man looked like a Flemish peasant, and reminded me, I know not why, of the one who accompanied you when we met that day after the flood."

Henry shuddered. The remark emphasized the interest the story inspired in him; to him, too, who had seen Diana and her companion entrusted to Aurilly, the idea had come that he knew the two travellers who had announced the death of the unfortunate lute-player to the prince.

Henry looked closely at the ensign.

"When you thought you recognized this man, what idea came to your mind, monsieur?" he asked.

"This is what I thought," replied the ensign; "but I can be sure of nothing. The prince probably has not given up his ideas concerning Flanders, consequently he employs spies; the man in the woollen overcoat is a spy who in his rounds heard of the accident to the musician, and brought back two pieces of news at the same time."

"That is very likely," said Henry, thoughtfully; "but what was this man doing when you saw him?"

"Walking along by the hedge which borders the pasture, — you can see it from your windows, — and going towards the conservatories."

"And you think the two travellers, for you say there are two" —

"The report is that two entered the gate, but I saw only one, the man in the overcoat."

"Then, according to you, the man in the overcoat lives in the conservatories?"

"Very likely."

"Have the conservatories an exit?"

"Yes, count, on the side of the city."

Henry was silent for a time. His heart beat violently. These details, apparently of so little importance, seemed to him, under the circumstances, to have a double meaning, and were of great interest.

During this conversation night had fallen, and the two young men were talking without a light.

Wearied from the journey, dazed by the strange events which had just been told him, without strength to overcome the emotions which they produced in him, the count had thrown himself on his brother's bed, and lay gazing fixedly at the blue of the sky, which seemed starred with diamonds.

The young ensign was seated on the window ledge, wholly given up to that relaxation of mind, that poetry of youth, that

velvety enervation of comfort caused by the balmy freshness of evening.

A great silence hovered over the park and the city, the gates were closed, by degrees the lights shone forth, dogs barked in distant kennels at the servants, whose duty it was to close the stables at night. Suddenly the ensign rose, raised his hand in token of silence, leaned out of the window, and spoke to the count in a quick, low tone.

"Come here," said he.

"What is it?" asked Henry, starting violently from his meditation.

"The man! the man!"

"What man?"

"The man in the overcoat, the spy."

"Oh!" exclaimed Henry, bounding from the bed to the window, and bending over the ensign.

"See," continued the latter, "do you see him over there by the hedge? Wait, he will reappear. See, look in the spot lighted by the moon. There! there!"

"Yes."

"Is he not sinister?"

"Sinister is the word," replied Du Bouchage, becoming gloomy.

"Do you think he is a spy?"

"I think nothing and everything."

"See, he is going from the prince's pavilion to the conservatories."

"Is the prince's pavilion over there?" asked Du Bouchage, pointing to the place where the stranger had just been seen.

"See that light trembling in the midst of the foliage?"

"Well?"

"That is in the dining-room."

"Ah!" cried Henry, "there he is again."

"Yes, he is certainly going to the conservatories to join his companion. Did you hear that?"

"What?"

"The noise of a key turning in a lock."

"That is strange," said Du Bouchage, "there is nothing peculiar in this, and yet" —

"And yet you shudder, do you not?"

"Yes!" said the count; "but what is that?"

A bell sounded.

"That is the signal for supper in the household of the prince; will you join us, count?"

"No, thanks, I want nothing, and if I feel hungry I will call."

"Do not wait for that, monsieur, but come and be enlivened by our company."

"No, impossible."

"Why?"

"His royal highness practically ordered me to have my supper in my own room; but do not let me detain you."

"Thanks, count, good evening! Keep good watch over our phantom."

"Oh, yes, I promise; unless," continued Henry, fearing he had said too much, "unless I should grow sleepy, which seems to me very likely and much more sensible than watching shades and spies."

"Certainly," said the ensign, laughing.

And he took leave of Du Bouchage. Scarcely had he left the library before Henry hurried into the garden.

"Oh," he murmured, "it is Rémy! it is Rémy! I should recognize him in the gloom of hell."

The young man, feeling his knees tremble under him, placed his cold hands on his burning forehead.

"My God!" said he; "is it not a fancy of my poor affected brain, and is it not written that in sleep as in waking hours, day or night, I shall constantly see these two figures, which have ploughed a furrow through my life? But," he continued, like a man who feels the necessity of convincing himself, "why should Rémy be here in this château with the Duc d'Anjou? What could he be intending to do? What could the Duc d'Anjou have in common with Rémy? How could he have left Diana, he who is her constant companion? No, it is not he."

Then, after a moment, a deep, instinctive conviction mastered all doubt.

"It is he! it is he!" he murmured in despair, leaning against the wall to keep from falling.

As he put into words this thought, dominating, invincible, mistress of all the others, the sharp grating of the lock again was heard, and although the sound was almost imperceptible, his over-excited senses detected it. An indescribable shudder ran through the young man. He listened again.

Such silence reigned about him that he heard the beating of his own heart.

Several minutes elapsed without his seeing anything that he was waiting for.

But in default of eyes, his ears told him that some one was approaching.

He heard the gravel creak under footsteps.

Suddenly the black line of the elm-tree hedge became uneven; it seemed to him that he saw a still darker group moving against this dim background.

"He is returning," murmured Henry. "Is he alone? or is some one with him?"

The figure advanced to where the moon silvered the empty space.

It was when the man in the overcoat, walking in the opposite direction, had crossed this space before that Henry thought he recognized him as Rémy.

This time Henry saw two shadows very distinctly; he could not be deceived.

A death-like chill seized his heart, and seemed to turn him to stone.

The two shadows walked quickly but firmly. The first was wrapped in a woollen overcoat, and again as at first the count thought he recognized him as Rémy.

The second figure, completely enveloped in a man's cloak, defied all analysis.

And yet beneath the cloak Henry thought he guessed what no one could see.

He gave a groan of pain, and, as soon as the two mysterious figures had disappeared behind the hedge, the young man hurriedly slipped behind them, and, gliding from tree to tree, followed the couple he was so anxious to recognize.

"O God!" he murmured, as he walked along, "can I be right? Is it possible?"

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

CERTAINTY.

Henry glided along the dark side of the hedge, taking care to make no noise either on the gravel or against the leaves.

Obliged to walk, and as he walked to keep watch, he could not see very well. However, from his appearance, his clothes, and his gait, he still thought he recognized Rémy in the man with the woollen overcoat.

Simple conjectures, more startling to him than any reality, rose in his mind in regard to the companion of this man.

The elm-tree walk led to a tall hedge of thorns, and to the wall of poplars which separated the pavilion of Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou from the rest of the park, and hid it behind a curtain of verdure, in the midst of which, as we have already said, it was entirely lost. Moreover, it was in an isolated corner of the château. There were beautiful little lakes there, dark groves filled with winding paths, and trees, over the summit of which the moon threw cascades of silver light, while below, the shadow was black, opaque, and impenetrable. On approaching this hedge, Henry felt his heart fail him.

In fact, thus boldly to transgress the orders of the prince, and to give himself up to such rashness, was the act, not of a loyal and honest gentleman, but of a cowardly spy, or of a jealous man driven to extremities.

But when on opening the gate which separated the large park from the small, the man made a movement which disclosed his face, and as this face was indeed that of Rémy, the count had no further scruples and went resolutely forward, at any risk whatsoever.

The gate was closed again, but Henry sprang over the fence and continued to follow the prince's strange visitors, who hastened on.

Another cause for terror now assailed him.

At the noise caused by the footsteps of Rémy and his companion on the gravel, the duke left the pavilion.

Henry stepped behind the largest of the trees and waited. He could see nothing, except that Rémy bowed very low, while his companion instead of bowing made a courtesy, and

the duke, transported with joy, offered his arm to the latter as he would have done to a woman.

Then all three turned towards the pavilion, and disappeared within the vestibule, the door of which was closed behind them.

"I must know the end of it," said Henry, "and find a more convenient place from which to see everything without being seen."

He decided on a clump of trees between the pavilion and the fruit-wall, in the centre of which a fountain played. It was an impenetrable hiding-place, for the prince would not visit the water and the bushes at night, in the freshness and humidity which naturally surrounded the fountain.

Hidden behind the pedestal of the statue which surmounted the fountain, by standing erect Henry was able to see what took place in the pavilion, the chief window of which opened exactly in front of him.

As it was supposed no one could or rather would intrude as far as that, no precaution had been taken.

A table was set, elegantly appointed and laden with choice wines in Venetian glasses.

Two seats at this table were waiting for two guests.

The duke advanced towards one, and, dropping the arm of Rémy's companion, pointed to the other, and seemed to ask her to remove her cloak, which, although very comfortable for a nocturnal walk, must have become very uncomfortable when the end of the journey had been reached, especially when this end was supper.

The lady, thus urged, threw her cloak over a chair, and the light of the candles falling on her pale and majestically beautiful face, Henry's frightened eyes at once recognized her.

It was the lady of the mysterious house in the Rue des Augustins, the traveller in Flanders; it was, in short, Diana, whose glance was as fatal as the thrust of a dagger. This time she had on women's clothes, and wore a brocaded gown; diamonds shone on her throat, in her hair, and on her wrists.

Under these jewels the pallor of her face was still more apparent, and in the light which flashed from her eyes one might have thought that the duke, by means of some magic, had evoked the shadow of a woman rather than the woman herself. Had it not been for the support of the statue on which

he had crossed his arms, which were colder than the marble itself, Henry would have fallen backwards into the basin of the fountain.

The duke seemed wild with joy. He gazed at the marvellous creature seated opposite him, who scarcely touched the food before her. From time to time Francis leaned over the table to kiss the hand of his silent and pale guest, who seemed as insensible to these kisses as if her hand had been carved in alabaster, which it resembled in its transparent whiteness.

Now and then Henry gave a start, raised his hand to his forehead, wiped away the icy perspiration which moistened it, and asked himself:

"Is she alive? Is she dead?"

The duke made every effort and employed all his eloquence to unbend that severe brow.

Rémy, the only attendant, for the duke, had sent every one else away, served the two, and occasionally touched his mistress with his elbow as he passed behind her, seeming by this contact to animate and bring her back to life, or rather to a realization of her situation.

Then a flush of crimson would mount to the young woman's forehead, her eyes shot forth fire, she smiled as if some magician had touched an unknown spring of some intelligent automaton and had operated on the mechanism of her eyes of fire, on that of her crimson cheeks, on that of her smiling lips. Then she again relapsed into passivity.

But the prince leaned towards her, and by his passionate words began to warm his new conquest.

Then Diana, who from time to time glanced at the magnificent clock hanging on the wall opposite her above the prince's head, seemed to make an effort over herself and with a smile still on her lips took an active part in the conversation.

In his leafy hiding-place Henry clenched his fists and cursed the whole creation, from the women God had made to God, who had made him.

It seemed to him monstrous and iniquitous that this woman, so pure and so severe, should thus completely give herself up to the prince because he was a prince, and to love because it was gilded in that palace. His horror of Rémy was such that he would have split him open in order to see if such a monster had the blood and the heart of a man.

It was in this paroxysm of rage and scorn that Henry passed

the time so sweetly spent by the Duc d'Anjou over the supper-table.

Diana rang. The prince, heated by the wine and his gallant words, rose from the table to embrace Diana.

Henry's blood boiled within him. He sought at his side for a sword, in his breast for a dagger.

Diana, with a strange smile which certainly until then had not had its equivalent on any face, stopped him.

"Monseigneur," said she, "before rising permit me to share this tempting fruit with your highness."

At these words she extended her hand towards the basket of gold filigree which contained some magnificent peaches, and took one.

Then, unfastening from her waist a charming little knife, the blade of which was of silver and the handle of malachite, she cut the peach in two and offered one half to the prince, who took it and raised it eagerly to his lips as if he were kissing Diana's.

This passionate act had such an effect on him that just as he bit the fruit a cloud seemed to obscure his sight.

Diana looked at him with her clear glance and passive smile.

Rémy, leaning against a pillar of carved wood, also looked on without moving.

The prince raised his hand to his brow, wiped away some drops of perspiration which were gathering there, and swallowed the piece of fruit he had bitten.

The perspiration, no doubt, was the symptom of some sudden indisposition; for while Diana ate her half of the peach, the prince dropped what remained of his upon his plate, and rising with an effort, seemed to ask his beautiful guest to walk in the garden with him. Diana rose, and, without uttering a word, took the arm the duke offered. Rémy watched them, especially the prince, whom the air seemed to revive completely. As she walked, Diana wiped off the little blade of her knife on a handkerchief embroidered with gold, and replaced it in its shagreen case.

In this way they drew near to the thicket in which Henry was hiding. The prince pressed the young woman's arm close to his heart.

"I feel better," said he, "and yet some weight oppresses my brain. I love too much, I see, madame."

Diana picked some jasmine flowers, a bit of clematis, and

two beautiful roses, which carpeted one side of the base of the statue, behind which Henry shrunk back in fright.

"What are you doing, madame?" asked the prince.

"I have always understood, monseigneur," said she, "that the perfume of flowers was the best remedy for dizziness. I am gathering a bouquet in the wish that, coming from me, it will have the magical effect for which I hope."

As she was arranging the flowers, she dropped a rose, which the prince gallantly hastened to pick up.

The movement of Francis was rapid, but not so rapid but that Diana had time to pour on the rose she held a few drops of a liquid from a flask she drew from her breast.

Then she took the rose the prince handed her and put it into her belt.

"This one is for me," said she; "let us exchange."

And for the rose she received from the hands of the prince she held out the bouquet.

The prince took it eagerly, inhaled it with delight, and passed his arm around Diana's waist. But this voluptuous embrace helped to complete the illness of Francis, for his knees bent under him, and he was forced to sit down on a grassy bank near by.

Henry did not lose sight of the two figures; yet he saw Rémy also, waiting in the pavilion for the end of this scene or rather apparently devouring its every detail.

When the attendant saw the prince stagger, he came to the door of the pavilion. Diana, on her part, feeling Francis tremble, sat down beside him on the bank.

This attack lasted longer than the first. The prince's head had fallen forward on his breast; he seemed to have lost the thread of his thoughts and almost the consciousness of his existence, and yet the convulsive movement of his fingers on Diana's hand indicated that he was instinctively following out his love-dream.

Finally he slowly raised his head, and his lips being on a level with Diana's face, he made an effort to touch hers, but the young woman rose as if she had not noticed the movement.

"Are you suffering, monseigneur?" said she, "would it not be better to return?"

"Oh, yes, let us go back!" cried the prince, in a transport of joy. "Yes, yes, thanks!"

He rose staggering, and instead of its being Diana who

SHE DROPPED A ROSE WHICH THE PRINCE GALLANTLY HASTENED TO PICK UP.

leaned on his arm, it was he who leaned on Diana's, and, thanks to this support, he walked more at his ease and seemed to forget the fever and dizziness. Straightening himself suddenly, he pressed his lips to the young woman's neck.

The latter started as if instead of a kiss she had felt the burn of red-hot iron.

"Rémy, a torch!" she cried, "a torch!"

Rémy at once returned to the supper-room and took a candle from a small stand. This he lighted from those on the table, and hurriedly brought it to the door of the pavilion.

"Here it is, madame," said he.

"Where will your highness go?" asked Diana, taking the candle and turning away her head.

"Oh! to my room! to my room! and you will guide me, will you not, madame?" replied the prince, passionately.

"Willingly, monseigneur," said Diana.

Lifting the torch in the air, she preceded the prince. Rémy opened a window at the rear of the pavilion, and the air blew in in such a way that the candle carried by Diana, as though furious, threw its entire flame and smoke upon Francis' face, which was directly in the current.

The two lovers, as Henry thought them, crossed a hallway, reached the apartment of the duke, and disappeared behind the fleur-de-lis drapery which served as a portière.

Henry had seen all that had taken place with increasing fury, and his anger was such that it brought with it thoughts of annihilation. One would have said that strength remained to him only to curse the fate which had imposed so cruel a proof on him.

He came out of his hiding-place exhausted, and with arms hanging down and haggard eye he was about to return half dead to his rooms in the château, when suddenly the curtain behind which he had just seen Diana and the prince disappear was pushed aside, and the young woman hastened to the supper-room and rushed to Rémy, who was standing motionless, as if waiting for her return.

"Come!" said she to him; "come, all is over"—

Both hurried into the garden as though intoxicated, mad, or furious.

At sight of them Henry had recovered all his strength. He sprang in front of them, and suddenly they found him in the middle of the path, standing with folded arms, more terrible in

his silence than he had ever been in his vehemence. In short, Henry had reached such a degree of exasperation that he would have killed any one who dared to say that women were not monsters sent by the devil to corrupt the world.

He seized Diana by the arm and stopped her, in spite of the terrified cry she gave, in spite of the knife which Rémy held to his breast, and which had already broken his skin.

"Oh! you probably do not recognize me," said he, with a horrible gnashing of the teeth. "I am the young man who loved you, and whose love you did not wish to return, because there was no future for you, but only a past. Ah! beautiful hypocrite, and you, you cowardly liar, at last I know you! I know you and I curse you; to one of you I say, 'I despise you,' to the other, 'You make me shudder!'"

"Back!" cried Rémy, in a choking voice; "back! young madman — or"—

"So be it," replied Henry, "finish your work, and kill my body, you wretch, as you have already killed my soul."

"Silence!" murmured Rémy, furious, burying the blade deeper and deeper into the breast of the young man.

But Diana pushed Rémy's arm violently aside, and grasping that of Du Bouchage, brought him face to face with her.

She was lividly pale. Her beautiful hair was stiff, as it lay on her shoulders. As her hand touched his breast Henry felt it was as cold as that of a corpse.

"Monsieur," said she, "do not rashly judge the affairs of God! I am Diana de Méridor, the mistress of Monsieur de Bussy, whom the Duc d'Anjou allowed to be killed in such a terrible manner, when he could have saved him. Eight days ago Rémy stabbed and killed Aurilly, the prince's accomplice. As to the prince himself, I have just poisoned him with some fruit, a bouquet, and a candle. Stand aside, monsieur! stand aside for Diana de Méridor, who is on her way to the Convent of the Hospitallers."

As she uttered these words she dropped Henry's arm and took that of Rémy, who was waiting for her.

Henry fell on his knees, then backwards, gazing after the two frightful assassins, who disappeared in the depths of the thicket like an infernal vision.

It was not until an hour later that the young man, overcome with fatigue, overwhelmed with terror, his head on fire, suc-

ceeded in regaining sufficient strength to drag himself to his own rooms.

He had to make ten attempts before he could enter by the window. He took a few steps in his room and then fell, staggering, upon the bed.

Every one in the château was asleep.

CHAPTER XC.

FATALITY.

The following morning, about nine o'clock, the sun was powdering the paths of Château Thierry with gold.

A number of laborers, having received orders the previous evening, had begun at dawn to prepare the park and the apartments for the reception of the King, who was expected. Nothing, however, was stirring in the pavilion in which the duke was resting, for the night before he had forbidden his two old servants to waken him. They were to wait until he should summon them.

Towards half-past nine two couriers, riding at full speed, entered the city, and announced the expected arrival of his Majesty. The sheriff, the governor, and the garrison formed ranks on either side of the road along which the procession was to pass.

At ten o'clock the King appeared at the foot of the hill. He had mounted a horse at the last relay. Being a fine rider, this was an opportunity of which he always took advantage, especially when he entered cities. The queen-mother followed in a litter. Fifty gentlemen, richly dressed and well mounted, rode in their suite.

A company of guards, commanded by Crillon himself, a hundred and twenty Swiss, as many Scotch, commanded by Larchant, and the entire household of the King, mules, coffers, and valets, formed an army, the ranks of which followed the winding road which rose from the river to the summit of the hill.

At length the procession entered the city to the ringing of bells, the firing of cannon, and music of every description. The shouts of the inhabitants were enthusiastic. The King appeared

so seldom in those days that, seen near by, he still seemed to have retained a ray of divinity. As he rode through the crowd, he sought in vain for his brother. He found only Henry du Bouchage at the gate of the château.

Once inside, Henry III. asked after the health of the Duc d'Anjou from the officer who had taken it on himself to receive his Majesty.

"Sire," replied the latter, "for several days his highness has been occupying the pavilion in the park, and we have not seen him this morning. However, it is probable that, as he was well yesterday, he is well to-day."

"This pavilion in the park must be a very retired spot, it seems to me," said Henry, displeased, "for a cannon not to be heard there."

"Sire," ventured one of the two servants of the duke, "perhaps his highness did not expect your Majesty so early."

"Old fool," growled Henry, "do you suppose that a king comes to visit people without notifying them beforehand? Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou has known of my expected arrival since yesterday."

Then, fearing to sadden every one by a careworn manner, and wishing to appear gentle and kind at the expense of Francis, he said:

"Since he does not come to us, let us go to him."

"Show us the way," said Catharine, from her litter.

The entire escort took the road to the ancient park.

Just as the first guard reached the hedge of elm trees a piercing and lugubrious cry rent the air.

"What is that?" exclaimed the King, turning towards his mother.

"My God!" murmured Catharine, endeavoring to read an explanation on every face; "it is a cry of distress or despair."

"My prince! my poor duke!" cried the other old servant of Francis, appearing at one of the windows, with gestures of the most violent grief.

Every one hastened to the pavilion, the King urged on by the others.

He reached there just as they were raising the body of the Duc d'Anjou, found on the floor of his bedroom by his valet, who had entered without orders to announce the arrival of the King.

The prince was cold and stiff, and showed no sign of life,

except a strange movement of the eyelids and a grinning contraction of the lips.

The King paused on the door-sill and the others behind him.

"This is a bad omen!" he murmured.

"Retire, my son," said Catharine, "I beg you."

"Poor Francis!" said Henry, glad to be sent away, and so to escape the agonizing sight.

The entire suite followed the King.

"Strange! strange!" murmured Catharine, kneeling down by the prince's body without other company than that of the two aged servants.

Search was at once begun for a physician, and a courier was despatched to Paris, in order to hasten the coming of the King's doctors, who were at Meaux with the Queen. Meanwhile the queen mother made a diagnosis — less scientific perhaps, but as intelligent as Miron himself could have made — of the strange malady to which her son had succumbed.

The Florentine had had experience. Therefore, first of all she questioned coldly and without embarrassing them, the two servants, who in their despair were tearing their hair and disfiguring their faces.

Both said that the prince had returned the evening before at nightfall, having been very inopportunely disturbed by Monsieur Henry du Bouchage, who had come from the King. They added that after this audience, held in the large château, the prince had had a light supper, had given orders that no one should come to the pavilion unless summoned, and had said positively not to waken him in the morning, nor to enter his room unless sent for.

"He expected some mistress, no doubt?" said the queen mother.

"We think so, madame," replied the valet, humbly, "but discretion prevented us from making sure of it."

"In clearing away the table, however, you must have seen whether my son had his supper alone."

"We have not yet removed the dishes, madame, since the orders of monseigneur were that no one should enter the pavilion."

"Good," said Catharine; "then no one entered?"

"No one, madame."

"You may retire."

Catharine was entirely alone.

Leaving the prince on the bed where they had laid him, she began a minute examination of each of the symptoms or traces which she thought might be the possible result of her suspicions or fears.

She had seen that the forehead of Francis had changed to a dark color, his eyes were blood-shot and surrounded by blue circles, his lips, ploughed by a furrow like that made by burning sulphur.

She had found the same mark on his nostrils and the sides of his nose.

"Let us see," said she, looking around the prince.

The first thing she noticed was the candlestick in which was the burned candle lighted the previous evening by Rémy.

"This candle evidently burned a long time," said she; "so Francis must have come to his room early. Ah! here is a bouquet on the floor"—

Catharine hastily picked it up, then, seeing that the flowers were still fresh except one rose which was black and withered:

"What is this?" she murmured. "What has been poured over the leaves of this flower? It seems to me I know a liquid which withers roses in this way."

She threw down the bouquet with a shudder.

"That explains the condition of his nostrils and the flesh on his forehead; but his lips?"

Catharine hurried to the dining-room. The valets had told the truth. Nothing showed that the table had been touched since the close of the meal.

On the edge of the table half of a peach, in which a row of teeth were imprinted, particularly attracted Catharine's attention.

This fruit, at heart so red, was as black as the rose, and was steaked on the inside with purple and brown.

The corrosive action was more especially visible on the cut, in the place where the knife had passed.

"Now for the lips," said she; "but Francis had bitten only a mouthful of the fruit. He had not held the flowers very long in his hand. The evil is not without a remedy, the poison cannot have penetrated deeply. But then, if it has acted only slightly, why is the paralysis so complete and the work of decomposition so advanced? I cannot have seen everything."

As she uttered these words, Catharine looked about her,

and saw suspended from its rosewood perch, by its silver chain, the red and blue paroquet of which Francis had been so fond.

The bird was stiff and dead; its wings bristled.

Catharine turned her anxious gaze to the candlestick, which she had already once examined, to make sure from its complete combustion that the prince had returned to the château early.

"The smoke!" said Catharine to herself, "the smoke! The wick of the candle was poisoned! My son is dead!"

She gave a call. The room was immediately filled with servants and officers.

"Miron! Miron!" cried some.

"A priest!" cried others.

In the meantime Catharine held one of the flasks she always carried in her bag to the lips of Francis, and studied his features to judge the effect of the counter poison.

The duke could still open his eyes and mouth, but no intelligence shone in the former, no voice came from his throat. Gloomy and silent, Catharine left the room, motioning to the two servants to follow her before speaking to any one. She led them to another pavilion, where she sat down, holding both by her glance.

"Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou," said she, "was poisoned by something he had for supper; you served this supper, did you not?"

At these words the pallor of death spread over the faces of the two men.

"Let us be tortured," said they, "or killed; but do not accuse us."

"You are simpletons. Do you suppose that if I suspected you that would not have been done already? I know very well you did not poison your master; but some one did, and I must discover the murderer who entered the pavilion."

"An old man shabbily dressed whom monseigneur received two days ago."

"But — the woman?"

"We did not see her — What woman does your majesty mean?"

"A woman came with a bouquet" —

The two servants looked at each other in such simplicity that by this one glance Catharine recognized their innocence.

"Send the mayor of the city and the superintendent of the château to me," said she.

The two valets hastened to the door.

"One moment!" said Catharine, detaining them by this one word. "You and I are the only ones who know what I have just told you. I shall not mention it; therefore, if any one hears of it, it will be through one of you. If that happens you will both die; now go!"

Catharine questioned the mayor and the superintendent less openly. She told them that the duke had received bad news about a certain person, which had affected him deeply, and which was the cause of his malady, and that by questioning the persons again the duke no doubt would recover from his alarm.

The city, the park, and the neighborhood were all searched, but no one could tell what had become of Rémy and Diana. Henry alone knew the secret, and there was no fear of his revealing it.

All day the startling news was commented on, exaggerated, and mutilated, as it spread through Château Thierry and the province.

Every one, according to his character and his feeling, explained the accident which had happened to the duke. But no one except Catharine and Du Bouchage admitted that the duke was a dead man. The unfortunate prince did not recover his voice nor his feeling, or, to express it better, he gave no further sign of consciousness.

The King, worried by lugubrious impressions which he feared more than anything else, would have liked to return to Paris; but the queen mother opposed his leaving, and the court was forced to remain at the château. Physicians arrived in large numbers. Miron alone guessed the cause of the malady and understood its seriousness; but he was too clever a courtier not to withhold the truth, especially after he had consulted Catharine's eyes.

He was questioned on all sides, and he replied that without doubt Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou had experienced deep grief and had sustained a violent shock. He did not compromise himself, a difficult thing to avoid in such a case. When Henry III. asked him to answer "yes" or "no" to the question "Will the duke live?" the physician answered:

"I will tell your Majesty in three days."

"And what will you tell me?" said Catharine in a low tone.

"You are different, madame; I should answer you without hesitation."

"What would you answer?"

"What question does your majesty ask me?"

"What day will my son die, Miron?"

"To-morrow evening, madame."

"So soon?"

"Ah! madame," murmured the physician, "the dose was much too strong."

Catharine placed her finger on her lips, looked at the dying man, and, in a low tone, repeated the sinister word:

"Fatality!"

CHAPTER XCI.

THE HOSPITALLERS.

The count passed a terrible night in a state verging on unconsciousness or death.

However, faithful to his duties, as soon as he heard the arrival of the King announced, he rose and received him at the gate as we have said; but, having presented his respects to his Majesty, saluted the queen mother, and pressed the admiral's hand, he shut himself in his room, not with any intention of killing himself, but with the determination of carrying out his project, which nothing now could prevent.

About eleven o'clock in the morning the terrible news was circulated that the Duc d'Anjou was dead. Every one had disappeared, leaving the King completely stunned at the sudden event, when Henry knocked at his brother's door. Joyeuse, who had spent part of the night on the highway, had just returned to his apartments.

"Ah! is it you?" asked the latter, half asleep; "what do you want?"

"I have come to bid you good-by, brother," replied Henry.

"What! good-by? You are going away?"

"Yes, brother, I am going away. There is nothing to detain me here any longer, I suppose."

"Nothing?"

"No, nothing; since the fêtes at which you desired me to

be present have not taken place, I am released from my promise."

"You are mistaken, Henry," replied the grand admiral; "I will not allow you to leave to-day, any more than I let you go yesterday."

"Very well, brother. But in that case, for the first time in my life, I shall have the pain of disobeying your orders and of lacking in respect, for from this moment I declare to you, Anne, that nothing can prevent my becoming a monk at once."

"But the dispensation from Rome?"

"I shall wait for it in the monastery."

"Really, you are decidedly mad," cried Joyeuse, rising, amazement depicted on his countenance.

"On the contrary, my dear and honored brother, I am the saner of us, for I alone realize what I am doing."

"Henry, you promised us a month."

"Impossible, brother."

"Wait just eight days."

"Not one hour."

"But you are suffering, poor boy."

"On the contrary, I am no longer suffering. That is why I see that my pain is irremediable."

"But, my friend, this woman is not made of bronze. One can move her, touch her. I will bend her."

"You cannot do the impossible, Anne. Besides, should she allow herself to be turned now I should not consent to love her."

"Come, the mystery deepens."

"It is true, brother."

"What! if she wanted you, you would no longer have her? Why, this is madness, by Heaven!"

"Oh! no indeed," cried Henry, with a gesture of horror. "There can no longer be anything between this woman and myself."

"What do you mean?" asked Joyeuse in surprise. "Who is this woman? Come, speak, Henry. You know very well we have never had secrets from each other."

Henry feared that he had said too much, and that by giving way to the feelings he had just shown he had given his brother a means of discovering the terrible secret hidden in his heart. He, therefore, went to the other extreme, and as often happens in such a case, to cover the rash speech which had just escaped him, he uttered one still more imprudent.

"Brother," said he, "do not urge me further; this woman cannot belong to me, because she already belongs to God."

"Mere talk. This woman a nun? She has lied to you, then."

"No, brother, this woman has not lied to me. She is a Hospitaller. Let us talk no more about it, but let us respect all who throw themselves into the arms of the Lord."

Anne had sufficient control over himself not to show Henry the joy that this revelation caused him. He went on:

"This is news. You have never told me of it."

"It is news, indeed, for she has recently taken the veil, but I am certain that her resolution, like mine, is irrevocable. So keep me here no longer, brother. Embrace me as you love me, let me thank you for all your kindness, all your patience, all your infinite love towards a poor madman, and farewell."

Joyeuse looked at his brother like a man deeply affected, who relies on this show of feeling to persuade the other.

But Henry remained unmoved, and replied by his sad and eternal smile. Joyeuse embraced his brother, and let him start.

"Go," said he to himself, "but all is not yet finished, and, impatient as you are, I shall soon overtake you."

He sought the King, who was breakfasting in bed, with Chicot beside him.

"Good morning! good morning!" said Henry to Joyeuse; "I am very glad to see you, Anne. I feared you would stay in bed all day, lazy one! How is my brother?"

"Alas, sire, I know nothing about him; I have come to talk to you about mine."

"Which one?"

"Henry."

"Does he still want to be a monk?"

"More than ever."

"And take the vows?"

"Yes, sire."

"He is right, my son."

"Why so, sire?"

"Yes, one reaches Heaven quickly by that road."

"Oh!" said Chicot to the King, "one reaches it more quickly still by the road your brother is taking."

"Sire, will your Majesty permit me to ask a question?"

"Twenty, Joyeuse, twenty! I am bored to death at Château Thierry, and your questions will distract me somewhat."

"Sire, do you know all the religious sects in the kingdom?"

"As well as I know heraldry, my dear fellow."

"What are the Hospitallers, if you please?"

"They are a small order, very distinguished, very rigid, and very severe, composed of twenty lady canonesses of Saint Joseph."

"Do they take the veil?"

"Yes, as a favor and on the presentation of the Queen."

"Will it be indiscreet to ask you where their order is situated, sire?"

"Not at all; it is in the Rue du Chevet Saint Landry, in the city, behind the church of Notre Dame."

"In Paris?"

"In Paris."

"Thanks, sire."

"But why the devil do you ask me that? Has your brother changed his mind, and does he wish to become a Hospitaller now instead of a friar?"

"No, sire, I should not think he was as foolish as that, after all your Majesty did me the honor of telling me; but I suspect that his head has been turned by some one in this order. Consequently I want to find out who it is and speak to her."

"By Heaven!" said the King, with a self-satisfied air, "about seven years ago I knew a mother superior who was very beautiful."

"Well, sire, perhaps she is the one."

"I do not know; from that time, Joyeuse, I too have been something of a monk."

"Sire," said Joyeuse, "at all events give me, I beg, a letter to this mother superior and leave of absence for two days."

"You are going to leave me?" exclaimed the King, "you are going to leave me all alone here?"

"Ungrateful one!" said Chicot, shrugging his shoulders, "am I not with you?"

"My letter, if you please, sire," said Joyeuse.

The King sighed, but began to write.

"You have nothing to do in Paris?" said Henry at last, handing him the letter.

"Pardon, sire, I shall escort or at least watch over my brother."

"That is right; go now and come back quickly."

Joyeuse did not wait for a repetition of this permission;

he quietly ordered his horses, and finding that Henry had already left, he set out at a gallop towards his destination.

Without stopping to remove his riding-boots, the young man went straight to the Rue du Chevet Saint Landry.

This street ended in the Rue d'Enfer and the Rue des Marmouzets, which was parallel with it.

A dark old house, behind the walls of which the high tops of some trees were visible; windows few and barred, and a small wicket door, — such was the exterior of the Convent of the Hospitallers. On the keystone of the porch a rough artist had cut out these Latin words with a chisel:

Matronæ Hospites

Time had half worn away the inscription and the stone.

Joyeuse knocked at the wicket and ordered his horses brought into the Rue des Marmouzets, for fear that their presence in the street would make too great a noise.

Then knocking at the grating of the tower:

"Kindly inform the mother superior," said he, "that Monsieur le Duc de Joyeuse, Grand Admiral of France, wishes to speak with her on the part of the King."

The face of the nun who had appeared behind the grating turned red under her veil, and the door was again closed.

Five minutes later the door again opened and Joyeuse entered the reception-room.

A tall and beautiful woman gave him a low bow, which the admiral returned, with the air of a churchman as well as that of a courtier.

"Madame," said he, "the King knows that you are about to admit or that you have already admitted among your probationers a lady to whom I must speak. Kindly let me meet her."

"Monsieur, the name of this lady, if you please?"

"I do not know it, madame."

"Then how can I grant your request?"

"Nothing is easier. Whom have you admitted during the past month?"

"You do not describe the lady fully enough; therefore I cannot grant your request."

"Why not?"

"Because until this morning I had received no one for one month."

"This morning?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Duc, and you see that your arrival, following only two hours after hers, looks too much like a pursuit for me to grant you permission to speak to her."

"Madame, I beg you."

"Impossible, monsieur."

"Just point out this lady to me."

"Impossible, I tell you. Besides, although your name sufficed for you to gain admission into my house, an order from the King is necessary to speak with any one here except myself."

"Here is the order, madame," replied Joyeuse, showing the letter which Henry had written for him.

The mother superior read it and bowed.

"The wish of his Majesty shall be carried out," said she, "even though it is contrary to the will of God."

They went towards the courtyard.

"Now, madame," said Joyeuse, stopping her courteously, "you see that I have the right; but I am afraid I may make a mistake. Perhaps this lady is not the one for whom I am looking. Kindly tell me how she came, why, and by whom she was accompanied?"

"All that is needless, Monsieur le Duc," replied the mother superior; "you will not make any mistake, and the lady who arrived this morning, after having been expected for fifteen days, and who was recommended to me by a person who has great authority over me, is without doubt the lady with whom you want to speak."

At these words the mother superior made another bow to the duke and withdrew. Ten minutes later she returned accompanied by a hospitaller whose veil completely hid her face. It was Diana, who had already taken the habit of the order. The duke thanked the mother superior, placed a stool for the strange lady, and sat down himself. The mother superior withdrew, and closed the doors of the dark, deserted parlor.

"Madame," said Joyeuse, without other preamble, "you are the lady of the Rue des Augustins, the mysterious woman whom my brother, the Count du Bouchage, loves so madly and fatally."

The hospitaller bent her head in answer, but did not speak. This affectation seemed to Joyeuse uncivil. He was already ill disposed towards the woman. He continued:

"Did you suppose, madame, that it was enough to be beautiful, or to seem beautiful? to have no heart hidden beneath this beauty, to rouse a hopeless passion in the heart of a young man of my name, and to say to this man, 'so much the worse for you if you have a heart; I have none nor do I want one'?"

"I did not say that, monsieur, and you have been wrongly informed," said the lady in a tone so dignified and so touching that the anger of Joyeuse was softened for an instant.

"The words do not alter the meaning, madame. You repulsed my brother and you have driven him to despair."

"Innocently, monsieur, for I always tried to keep Monsieur du Bouchage at a distance."

"That is called the art of coquetry, madame, and the result shows the fault."

"No one has any right to accuse me, monsieur. I am guilty of nothing. You are angry with me; therefore I will say no more."

"Oh! oh!" said Joyeuse, growing excited by degrees; "you have ruined my brother, and you think to justify yourself by this provoking majesty? No, no; the step I am taking ought to enlighten you as to my intentions. I am serious, I swear to you, and you can see from the trembling of my hands and my lips that you will need good arguments to turn me."

The hospitaller rose.

"If you have come to insult a woman," said she, with the same coolness; "insult me, monsieur; if you have come to make me change my mind, you will lose your time; therefore, leave."

"Ah! you are no human creature," cried Joyeuse, exasperated; "you are a demon!"

"I have told you that I will say nothing more; as that is not enough, I will withdraw."

And the hospitaller turned towards the door.

Joyeuse stopped her.

"Ah! one moment! I have sought you too long to lose you in this way; and since I have succeeded in finding you, since your indifference confirms me in the idea I already had that you are an infernal creature, sent by the enemy of mankind to ruin my brother, I will see your face on which destruction has written its blackest threats. I will see the fire of the fatal glance which sends wits astray. Between us two, Satan!"

Joyeuse made the sign of the cross with one hand in the

manner of exorcism, and with the other snatched the veil which covered the lady's face. The latter, mute, impassible, without anger or reproach, fixed her pure, gentle glance on the man who had thus cruelly outraged her.

"Oh! Monsieur le Duc," said she, "what you have done is unworthy of a gentleman!"

Joyeuse was cut to the heart. This appeal to his manliness softened his anger; so much beauty turned his head.

"You are indeed beautiful," said he after a long silence, "and Henry must have loved you. But God gave you beauty only to scatter it like a perfume over an existence attached to yours."

"Monsieur, you have not spoken to your brother, or if you have spoken to him, he has not thought it wise to make you his confidant. Otherwise he would have told you that I have done as you say; I have loved. I shall never love again; I have lived and I must die."

Joyeuse had not turned his eyes from Diana; the fire of her piercing glance had penetrated to the depths of his soul, like volcanic jets of fire which melt statues of bronze by merely passing near them.

This ray consumed all animal matter in the heart of the admiral; pure gold alone burned there, and his heart burst like a crucible under the fusion of metal.

"Oh! yes," said he again, in a lower tone, still keeping fixed on her a glance in which the fire of anger was abating more and more. "Oh, yes, in spite of himself Henry must have loved you. Oh! madame, in pity, on my knees I beg you, madame, love my brother!"

Diana remained cold and silent.

"Do not reduce a family to agony; do not ruin the future of our race; do not make one die of despair, the others of regret."

Diana did not answer, but continued to gaze sadly at the suppliant kneeling before her.

"Oh!" cried Joyeuse, pressing his heart furiously with his nervous hand; "oh, have pity on my brother, have pity on me! I am on fire! that look of yours has consumed me! Farewell, madame, farewell!"

He rose like a madman, turned or rather tore away the locks from the door of the reception-room and fled half-crazed to his attendants, who were waiting for him at the corner of the Rue d'Enfer.

CHAPTER XCII.

HIS HIGHNESS MONSEIGNEUR LE DUC DE GUISE.

On Sunday, the tenth of June, about eleven o'clock, the entire court was assembled in the room next to the one in which, since his meeting with Diana of Méridor, the Duc d'Anjou had been slowly but surely dying.

Neither the skill of the physicians, nor the despair of his mother, nor the prayers ordered by the King, had averted the fatal event.

On the morning of June the tenth Miron had announced to the King that the malady was incurable and that Francis d'Anjou would not live through the day.

The King had affected great grief, and, turning toward those present:

"This will raise the hopes of my enemies," said he.

To which the queen mother had replied:

"Our destiny is in the hands of God, my son."

Chicot, who was standing humble and contrite near King Henry III., added in a low tone:

"Let us assist God when we can, sire."

Nevertheless, about half-past eleven the duke lost his sight. His mouth, which had been open until then, closed. The flow of blood which for several days had frightened those present, as the bloody perspiration of Charles IX. once caused terror, suddenly stopped, and his extremities became cold.

Henry was sitting at the head of his brother's bed. Catharine, with one icy hand on the dying man, stood at the side.

The Bishop of Château Thierry and the Cardinal de Joyeuse read the prayers for the dying, which were repeated by those present, kneeling and with folded hands.

Towards noon the sick man opened his eyes. The sun came out from behind a cloud and wrapped the bed in an aureola of gold.

Francis, who until then had been unable to move a single finger, and whose consciousness had been veiled like the sun which had come out, raised one arm towards Heaven with a gesture of terror.

He looked about him, heard the prayers, realized his illness and weakness, comprehended his condition, perhaps because he

already saw that obscure and gloomy world to which certain souls go on leaving the earth.

Then with a great cry he struck his forehead with a force which sent a shudder through the whole assembly, and frowned as if he had just read in his mind one of the mysteries of his life.

"Bussy!" he murmured; "Diana!"

No one except Catharine heard the last word, so weak was the voice in which the dying man had uttered it.

After pronouncing this name Francis d'Anjou heaved his last sigh.

At that instant, by a strange coincidence, the sun, which had been gilding the escutcheon of France and the gold fleurs-de-lis, disappeared; so that the fleurs-de-lis, so bright an instant before, became as dark as the azure which they had lately brightened by a constellation almost as resplendent as that which the eye of the dreamer seeks in the sky.

Catharine dropped the hand of her son.

Henry III. shuddered and leaned trembling on the arm of Chicot, who shuddered also, from the respect which every Christian owes the dead. Miron held a gold dish to Francis' lips, and after a few seconds looked at it.

"Monseigneur is dead," said he.

A long groan rose from the ante-chamber, like the accompaniment of the psalm which the cardinal was reading.

"*Cedant iniquitates meæ ad vocem deprecationis meæ.*"

"Dead!" repeated the King, making the sign of the cross from the depths of his armchair; "my brother! my brother!"

"The sole heir to the throne of France," murmured Catharine, who had already left the bedside of the dead and was standing by her one remaining son.

"Oh!" said Henry; "the throne of France is very wide for a king without posterity; the crown is very large for one head alone. No children — no heirs! Who will succeed me?"

As he uttered these words, a great noise was heard on the stairs and in the room. Nambu hastily entered the death-chamber and announced:

"His highness Monseigneur le Duc de Guise."

Struck by this answer to the question he had addressed to himself, the King turned pale, rose, and looked at his mother.

Catharine was paler than her son. At the announcement of the horrible misfortune which chance had foretold to her

race, she seized the King's hand and pressed it, as if to say to him,

"Here is the danger — but fear nothing, for I am with you!"

Mother and son felt the same terror and the same foreboding.

The duke entered, followed by his captains. He held his head erect, although his eyes sought the King or the deathbed of his brother, with a certain embarrassment. Henry III., standing with the supreme majesty which perhaps his strangely poetic nature alone showed in certain moments, stopped the duke by a sovereign gesture, and indicated to him the royal corpse on the bed disordered by the last agony.

The duke bent his head and gently knelt down.

Every one about him bent his head and knelt.

Henry III. alone remained standing with his mother, his eyes for the last time shining with pride.

Chicot noticed this look, and murmured in a low tone this other verse of the Psalms: "*Dejiciet potentes de sede et exaltabit humiles.*"

("He will cast down the proud from their throne, and will exalt those who humble themselves.")

END.